

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

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The K K Surendran prize

We start the new year (for which good wishes to all our readers) on a happy note. Shri K K Surendran who was formerly a research assistant at the Bombay Natural History Society has offered a prize of Rs.100/- for the best article published in 1978. It is another twelve months before the onerous responsibility of selecting the "best" article descends on the shoulders of the editor. Meanwhile it will be a help if readers can suggest a few guidelines for the selection.

Symposium on Ecology & Conservation II by Zafar Futehally

In the last issue of the Newsletter I mentioned that at the Symposium on the Ecology and Conservation of birds and mammals held in Bangalore in Nov.77 several interesting papers on birds were presented. I dealt with a few in the past issue and will continue in the same vein.

V.C. Ambedkar, as was to be expected, presented a paper on weaver birds which is his speciality. He says "During the field study in the Kumaon terai in August 1974, I came across a very unusual breeding colony on a lofty tree Mitragyna parviflora (Rubiaceae) where there were nearly half the nests of abnormal forms. Looking at the colony I was impelled immediately to study the causes, if any, for such large abnormality. There were in all 186 nests comprising both normal and abnormal, with total number of 326 egg-chambers. Moreover, there were 55 half-finished nests for accomodating unmated females. I observed a six-storeyed nest one below the other whose total length was 160 cms. i.e. 5 feet and 3 inches. Eleven nests forming a composite unit fused with each other.

In all 46 birds were ringed with coloured rings in addition to the aluminium rings of the Bombay Natural History Society.

It was observed that the hyperstructures to the normal nests were added by the original builder. In composite unit, three males were observed to be building their nests. These nests were actually fused together to form a single structure. In one case, where two nests were in physical contact, they were occupied by two different females.

A snake Ptyas myoosus was frequently found to be visiting the colony regularly to devour eggs and young.

It is suggested that predation, polygamy, played an important role in the formation of abnormal nests. A large compact giant structure seems probably to be a measure to divert attention of the predator, thereby saving,

to some extent, late born young. Probably it is also a solution to the shortage of nest sites.

Priya Davidar presented a most interesting paper on the plant parasite Loranthus and its host plants in the Nilgiris. She was trying to assess among other things the host selectivity of the Loranthus and feels that the dispersal agent, namely the Flowerpecker could play an important part in determining the host species. It is unfortunate in a way from the point of view of the Conservationist, that because Eucalyptus sheds its bark rapidly the Loranthus cannot get a foothold on this exotic plant, which has certainly no place in the midst of our natural forests.

P. Kannan spoke about the nectar feeding adaptation of flower birds and described the general characteristics of the 37 species of Bombay. They are of two types according to Kannan: non specialised nectar feeders with licking type of bill and tongue, and specialised nectar feeders with suctional bill and tongue. "Of the nine species of nectar feeders studied, only sunbirds combine the most highly evolved structural adaptations for nectar-feeding (resulting need of nectar) with the ability to make use of the nectar of the largest number of flowers, including those not adapted to receive their visits.

The short-cut method of nectar feeding is a behavioural adaptation of high selective value which has possibly enabled sunbirds to develop highly evolved bill and tongue for nectar feeding and has compensated for the evolutionary ill effects of high specialization to a relatively narrow food niche."

M. Krishnan discussed the availability of nesting materials and nesting sites as a vital factor in the gregarious nesting of Indian Water Birds. There are certain instinctive urges and preferences determining the choice of nesting sites and trees or other plants. There are factors like insulation by water and other protective potential of the nesting site: There are physiological factors significant for getting the birds into breeding condition; the survival value of congested nesting; the versatility and the choice of nesting sites and plants; the utilisation of the nests for raising successive broods during each nesting season and the replenishment of the nest and the lining material. There are specific considerations like the need for thorny twigs as the foundation of the nest construction and the availability of less thorny twigs and lining material, mainly green leaf for the inner lining. The author is of the view that the lack of adequate and natural supply of nesting materials is a likely cause for the abandoning of old nesting sites and the deterioration of waterbird sanctuaries in India.

to be continued

(1)

Water birds in the Indian desert by Indira Kumar Sharma & B.D. Rana

Perennial rain-pools and tanks are scarce in the Indian desert. However, bird-watching at one such site was conducted for three days during October 1977 at Gaddisar tank close to Jaisalmer. The water spread area of the tank is about 500 x 300 meters. Aquatic weeds in the tank are Chara sp, Sagittaria spp and Vallisneria spiralis etc. The skipper frog Rana cynophly-
vetis is abundant, preyed upon by many birds.

35 Little grebes (Podiceps ruficollis) were sighted swimming and diving in the middle of the tank and the frogs were wary of them. The Grebes were observed flying to the other side on noticing the hovering of a Pale harrier (Circus macrourus). Four Grey ducks (Anas poecillorhyncha) were found swimming in the middle of the tank or resting at an island of the tank. A pair of common Kingfishers (Alcedo atthis) was noted on a bush at the island.

The island was about 15 x 10 meters having a medium size 'Khejara' tree (Prosopis cineraria) and the old tomb with a dense growth of aquatic weeds around the island. There was the nest of the Spoonbill (Platalea leucorodia) on the tree, usually 11 Spoonbills were seen perching there and another on the shore. Surprisingly, one Peacock (Pavo cristatus) used to be seen there in the morning, resting under the roof of the tomb. About 17 Redwattled lapwings (Vanellus indicus) were observed at the island and their 4 young chicks probably, the Lapwings collected there for breeding, being secured against stray dogs and cats around the shore. Six Blackwinged stilts (Himantopus himantopus), 5 Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos) and 8 Little Stint (Calidris minutus) were sighted on the island, either picking food or resting. These birds were also noted on the shores of the Tank. Four Coots (Fulica atra) were occasionally seen at the island.

On the other shore of the tank, 15 Blackwinged stilts, 5 Little egrets (Egretta garzetta), one Grey heron (Ardea cinerea), two Cattle-egrets (Bubulcus ibis) and four Pond herons (Ardeola grayii) were also observed.

On the far shore about 7 Pariah kites (Gyps bengalensis) and five Scavenger vultures (Neophron percnopterus) were observed sitting for hours, having perhaps come for a drink.

A pair of Rollers (Coracias bengalensis) and four Hoopoes (Upupa epops) were sighted moving around the shore in search of insects, food. A large number of the Green bee-eater (Merops orientalis) were seen hunting insects in thickets of Prosopis juliflora trees growing around the tank. In the morning and evening many House-swifts (Apus affinis) were seen performing acrobatics over the tank, their nests were located under roofs of tombs.

A large number of House crows (Corvus splendens) were found hunting water insects, molluscas and frogs on the shores. Similarly a large number of pigeons (Columba livia). A number of the Common sandgrouse (Pterocles exustus) ranging 5 to 14 (mode was 5 and 7) were observed arriving at the tank from 8.55 a.m. to 9.50 a.m., the peak timing was 9.15 a.m. to 9.30 a.m.

We explored some more tanks also in the desert, which were comparatively smaller. The Redwattled lapwing, the Little egret, the Blackwinged stilt, and the Little stint were observed at every tank. The Spoonbill, the Grey duck and other water birds were found at large tanks only, but the Little grebe was found at medium size tanks also. It is noteworthy that the house crow was observed on the shores of tanks in fair number close to villages and towns. It haunts the tanks to take frogs fishes and other water animals.

Extracts from a letter by Aamir Ali

You had specially asked me to send you a full report on the Seychelles and Nairobi and so here you are.

The Seychelles are just what you dream about, and imagine as a "South Sea Island". It is something like Hawaii and Fiji and so on must have been like a couple of hundred years ago. And I am afraid that the Seychelles, too, will get spoilt and ruined very quickly, because they are already attracting hordes of tourists. All the hotels were full, the facilities strained, under the weight of the tourists. Several new hotels are under construction.

Victoria, the capital on Mahe Island, is a very small town: you can walk from one end to the other in ten minutes.

The Island is lush and green and thickly wooded, with a few well hidden villages. The coast is partly rocky and partly sandy beaches (the tourist pamphlet said there were 68 sandy beaches on Mahe) and the water is clear and lovely to swim in. The thing to do is to hire a car and drive around yourself, visiting different beaches. Unfortunately, all cars available for hire were already rented out, so we had to be content with a taxi.

The ferry service to Praslin Is. was also very crowded so we hired a motor-boat for one day with two attendants and had a glorious time. We went across to Cousin Is. Besides Mr. Lloyd, the manager, there are four Seychellois resident on the Island. We asked if we could land and were told we needed a permit in order to do so. I said I knew Mr. Lloyd personally (which of course I did not), so they went and asked him. He came down himself and

came alongside in a small boat. I said I brought him greetings from Salim Ali etc. and finally Lloyd allowed us to come ashore and took us round for an hour or so. It was a fascinating visit. Thousands of nests - of lesser and common noddies, fairy terns, tropic birds, and others. Also the famous Brush warbler-Lloyd estimated them were about 10 of them left. Also saw one of the few remaining Seychellois tortoises. I enclose a copy of a leaflet which visitors are given and which you will find interesting. A certain Mr. Thorpe was also visiting the Is. for a few days, and he knew Salim very well, sent his greetings. He was on his way to Japan for a meeting and was going to stop for a week on Cousin Is., on the way back as well.

We went on to Praslin Is. and visited the famous Vallee de Mai, where the huge coco de mer grow. These are fantastic trees. It is not only the size of the trees which is impressive but the size of the leaves - I would say about 10 or 15 meters in height. Even a slight breeze makes a terrific rustling of the leaves.

There is an overwhelming feeling that the attractiveness of the Seychelles is not going to last long. All the tourists, including us, were busy saying that we wanted to see it before it was spoilt by tourists. The government claims to be very conscious of the need to preserve the natural beauty of the islands, but how long will they be able to fight against big moneyed interests?

Kenya was another fascination. It is a naturalists paradise. I don't think that the wealth of bird and animal life is particularly more exciting than that of India, but it is so much accessible and visible. Certainly, for the casual tourist, there is no comparison.

It seems to me that there are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the tourist arrangements are excellent and very highly developed. Dozens of agencies, all ready with excellent cars, mini buses, or land rovers to take you to a hundred different places. Excellent, luxurious, lodges and hotels in the National Parks. Secondly, the nature of the terrain and vegetation makes animals much more visible. The land is flat and thinly forested - scrub, mostly. So you can see long distances and as you drive round you are seldom more than five minutes without seeing something. We spent about three hours in the Nairobi National Park, (about fifteen minutes from the centre of town) and a day in the Tsavo Park (we had a 3 hour drive in a land rover in the afternoon). We saw scores of elephants, giraffes, zebras, gerenuks, ostriches. Also saw several rhinos, hippos. and one leopard. Lions on two occasions.

The bird life too was a wonder. In India, though I know practically nothing about birds, I can on most occasions at least hazard a guess as to the family to which a bird belongs. In Kenya it all seemed new and strange. With the

help of a book and some questions, we got to know a few of the commoner birds: starlings (superb, and gold fronted): weaver birds, hornbills (Yellowbilled and redbilled), maribou stork, Egyptian geese, herons, sun-birds, and so on.

Incidentally, one bird observation on the Seychelles: There were no crows or Pariah kites at all. Also, now I think back, perhaps no sparrows. A small turtle dove seemed to fill their place and was always around in built up areas.

Rare Kestrel numbers up (Courtesy World Wildlife News Summer 1977)

The Mauritius kestrel, probably the rarest bird of prey in the world, has increased its numbers to 13 following the successful fledging of five young.

David McKelvey, who is working for conservation of the kestrels (*Falco punctatus*) with support from the World Wildlife Fund reports that he had the good fortune to witness one of the fledglings take to the air for the first time. The nest was three quarters of the way up a rocky outcrop, and the parent birds visited it and then coursed back and forth along the cliff face.

The adults drifted away to the west across a wide valley, calling shrilly. In a few minutes I suddenly saw a third kestrel emerge from the hole and fly strongly out over the ravine. It then faltered and tried to soar, giving the impression that this business of flying was all very new. Regaining its sense of direction it returned to the cliff and rather ungracefully alighted in a thick shrub above the nest hole.

"The following morning I saw not only one but three fine, perfectly-feathered young, a bit shorter tailed than their parents, flying near the cliff face against a bright blue sky."

A second nest on an inaccessible ledge producing two young.

Hunting and destruction of their forest habitat have brought the kestrel to the brink of extinction, along with attacks on their nests by monkeys after eggs and young. Successful reproduction has only been achieved in the last few years when the birds chose nest sites which the monkeys could not get at. Preparations had been made to guard vulnerable nests.

Attempts are being made to breed the kestrel in captivity in Mauritius, so far without success, although the scientists involved remain optimistic, based on success in captive breeding of falcons elsewhere.

Correspondence

Mr. Miss. Hamida Saiduzzafar

This is with reference to the article on "chronological time-sense in birds" by A. Navarro in the Newsletter of November 1977.

In my compound I have had occasion to observe a Crimson-breasted Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) roosting every night in a disused angled metal pipe. My notes indicate that the time at which the bird goes into the pipe at night and the time at which it emerges every morning can be timed to the minute. I have been observing it off and on for the last six years, and I have found that its timing varies most exactly according to the length of the days at different seasons. For example, I noted on 20-9-71 that it went to roost at 6.20 p.m., and emerged the next morning at 6.15 a.m., and in September 1977, the timing was almost exactly the same on the corresponding dates. Roosting times of other birds, e.g. Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), which is a winter visitor here, have been similarly recorded and found to be startlingly accurate, varying slightly with the length of the days and nights. The evening roosting time can usually be related very closely to the sound of the "Zazaan" which is clearly heard in my house.

Birds on my Verandah 16' x 9'

Mrs. Indira Kohli

Three munias have built a nest in a rose climber outside my drawing room. The nest is flush with a window pane. From Dr. Salim Ali's Book of Indian Birds I have identified them as the *Uroloncha punctulata* (Linnaeus). I have observed there is a distinct method in the apparent madness of a munia's nest! The straws are carefully looped in a figure of 8 and the eggs are laid in the bowl of each loop. The lower bowl now contains four eggs and the upper one, three eggs. I have never seen four munias together in the nest; obviously the male has two wives. The birds fly in and out of the nest through a side hole which gives access to both chambers. The females do not sit on the eggs all the time.

I am not an ornithologist, but I know I am in a position to observe facts that would be of interest to ornithologists if only I knew what to look for!

In addition to the munias, a pair of sparrows have made a nest in a wicker-work lampshade on my verandah. Swallows (wire tailed) have built a mud nest on the wall of the same verandah. The sparrows keep trying to break the swallows nest whenever it is left unguarded. Two more sparrows had built a nest in a flower pot of ferns on this verandah. Their eggs have hatched.

and the little ones are now learning to fly. Three more munias have built a nest in another rose climber over the porch near the verandah. A pair of birds which I have not yet been able to identify (blackish-brown bodies, reddish and white chests, size of Myna), have started building a nest in a wicker work standard lamp on the same verandah.

The birds are not frightened of me, and they live in reasonable harmony with each other. Whenever I have the time I sit on the verandah and watch their antics.

Would ornithologists who are interested in any particular aspect of the behaviour of any of these birds please write and let me know?

B.A. Palkhiwalla

Lately, when I had been to Tarapore, I enjoyed watching some of our common birds like Hoopoes, Golden oriole, Sandpipers, Redvented bulbuls, Common mynas, Palm swifts, House swifts and Common Bee-eater.

However, I could not identify a dark grey bird which came to our dining table every afternoon to pick up some leftover food. The bird was the size of a Common myna, dark grey all over and was very quiet. When I described this bird to our friend Serrao at the BNHS, he said it could be the Malabar whistling thrush. I am not sure if it could be this one, as it does not tally with the birds description in Dr. Salim Ali's Handbook of Indian birds.

Interaction of a Redwattled Lapwing & a Dog

R.K. Bhatnagar

Recently on 25-5-75 while passing beside the lawn of our library at about 14.30 hrs, I happened to watch the interaction of a lapwing and a dog. The Lapwing was behaving in a dare devil manner and did not mind the approach of the straggling dog within the hedge boundry of the lawn. But as the dog approached further the Lapwing started emitting a loud Tit tit tui tit t-ui t-ui. Only after driving out the dog did she calm down. A closer search of the vicinity revealed a crude nest with 4 eggs in the bush. Obviously the bird was protecting its nest.

An instance of Common myna feeding on wall-lizard

Manjit Singh Dhindsa

On 10th August 1977, at about 1.30 p.m. a common myna (Acridotheres tristis

linn) was seen hunting a wall lizard (Hemidactylus flaviviridis) in the bathroom of Boys Hostel Number 7, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana (Punjab). The mynas, usually in a group of four or five, were seen visiting the same bathroom a few times earlier also, but the purpose of their visit was not understood. On the above mentioned day, one myna was observed catching a wall lizard by the tail in its beak. The lizard immediately shed off its tail and escaped. The myna swallowed the wriggling tail at once and flew out of the bathroom through a broken window pane. Perhaps the bird was disturbed by the arrival of the birdwatcher and did not try to catch the escaping lizard again. Though the common myna has been reported to be an omnivorous feeder, this, instance of the bird feeding on wall lizard is quite interesting and of biological significance. As far as the author knows, this type of feeding habit of common myna has not been reported earlier.

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Prof. Kameshwar Singh, Dhelwagorain, Po-Barh Dist. - Patna, Bihar 803213 Rs.10/-; Dr. Miss. Hamida Saiduzzafar, Gul-e-Rana, Near Amir Nishan, Aligarh 202001 Rs.65/-; Mr. K.K. Surendran, Mulanthuruthy 683214, Kerala Rs.115/-; Mr. Pankaj Kumar, A-303, Hall-5, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, Rs.15/-; Mr. Vivek Kunte, 10 Kuppuswamy Street, T'nagar, Madras-600 017 Rs.15/-; Mr. Dipendu K R Roychowdhury, 206, Harish Mukherjee Road, Calcutta 700026 Rs.15/-; Mr. Ashwin Mehta, 9, Pushpa Griha, Khar-Pali Road, Bombay 400 050 Rs.15/-; The Librarian, Vikram A. Sarabhai Community Science Centre, Ahmedabad 380009 Rs.15/-; Shri Kartikeya V. Sarabhai, Vikram A. Sarabhai Community Science Centre, Ahmedabad 380009 Rs.15/-; Mr. Thomas Gay, Dev Kunj, Prabhat Road, Poona 411 004 Rs.20/-; Mr. P.T. Thomas, 14, 1st Sehere Road, Indore 1 Rs.100/-; Mr. Nazir Latif, Mackenzie & Company Ltd, Shoorji Vallabhdas Marg, P.O. Box 122, Bombay 400 038 Rs.15/-; Mr. Joseph George, Indian Plywood Industries Research Institute, Post Bag No 2273, Tumkur Road, Bangalore 560022 Rs.15/-; Col. A.A. David, Officers Old Police Lines, Delhi 110054 Rs.10/-; Mr. V.S. Velayudan, B41, 2nd Main Road, Ramalinga Nagar, Tiruchirapalli 620 003 Rs.5/-; Mr. A.M. Tyabji, 3-C, Somerset Place, 61-D, B. Desai Road, Bombay 400 026 Rs.15/-; Proff. K.K. Neelakantan, 24/1337 Behind G.P.O. Trivandrun 695001 Rs.15/-; Mr. M.V. Achar, Secretary, Wildlife Club- FRI & Colleges, PO NEW Forest, Dehra Dun 248 006 Rs.30/-; Mr. Shantilal N. Varu, J V Mavrs, Pipla Street, Madhapur (Kutch) Pin 370020 Rs.15/-; Mr. M.B. Khatri, C/o Bapu Abdullah Khatri, Khatri Chowk, Bhuj (Kutch) 370 001 Gujarat Rs.15/-; Mr. A. Ramakrishnan, Atlas Copco(I) Ltd, 853-B, 4th Cross Indiranagar, 2nd Stage, Bangalore 560038 Rs.15/-; Brig. JP Anthony, "Salopia" 6-3-348 Punjagutta, Hyderabad 500004 Rs.15/-; Mary K. McNabb, Laxmi Vilas, 15/2 Marshall Road, Madras 600008 Rs.15/-; Mr. V.R. Bhat, 68, Kika Street, 3rd floor, Bombay Rs.15/-; Mrs Parveen Sisodia, 67A, Nepean Sea Road, Bombay 400 006 Rs.30/-; Miss Ann Talbot Smith, Cathay Building, Singapore 9 Rs.5pound; Mrs. M.E. Wilkinson, Kohnaur Fellowship, Tirunelveli District

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Extracts from a letter by Aamir Ali

We had one weekend in Nairobi, so naturally went to a National Park to look at Kenya's wildlife. There were seven of us. If you get a party of 7, you get a minibus to yourselves, and its much cheaper. We went to the Amboseli Park, and of course ran into most of the other participants in our meeting who had also done the same thing. The Lodge, where we stayed consisted of cabins, attractive enough, on a flat and rather dusty plain. When we were in Kenya in 1972, we went to West Tsavo Park, and that was in many ways a far more attractive place. There our camp - we had stayed in a tented camp - was on the banks of a river, with hills and forests behind us. There were far fewer people and less cars and altogether a more 'jungle' atmosphere, against the rather crowded, tourist, tripper atmosphere of the Amboseli Lodge.

While much of the water from this mountain flows into the Amboseli Park, and into Amboseli Lake, so that there are parts which are very lush and green, most of the Park is dry and dusty. At least it was when we went there. A frequent sight was little whirlpools of dust, or dust devils, like tall funnels, moving slowly across the plain. Some were quite large.

What about birds? Yes, there were plenty, and new species on every hand. But being with six other people, none of whom was particularly interested, it was impossible to stop all the time to look at birds. However, I did get them a bit interested and we made several stops to watch a particularly striking bird. For instance, once we came face to face with a Chestnut Bellied Sandgrouse, and he watched us while we watched him. Another similar encounter was with Coqui Francolin, but he hurried off rather fast. A common black and white bird was the Blacksmith Plover, and another reasonably common and attractive bird was the Long Toed Lapwing, with long red legs and a red bill. The Marabou Storks, plentiful, look rather gloomy and funeral creatures; far more attractive was the Saddle Bill Stork, again black and white, but with a bill that was bright black, yellow and red. The African Jacana was frequent near water, coloured bright chestnut, and very properly also called a Lily Trotter. There was an African Hoopoe on the grounds of the Lodge. An impressive bird is the African Fish Eagle, several of which I had seen around Addis also. At Lake Nakuru, there were several on the ground, among various other water birds, almost undistinguishable from the pelicans, Ibises and Egrets. Also more successful, I felt, because twice I saw one of them flying

off with a juicy morsel from under the eyes of all the other birds. We also saw a Purple Heron with a slightly reddish neck. Another interesting sight was the Kori Bustard. We saw this twice, both times very near the car. Once, it crossed the road right in front of us and waited on the other side till we came up.

On the last day of our meeting, Friday 29 July, I played hookey, and took the day off to go to Lake Nakuru. I had been dying to visit this Lake having heard for years about the rich bird life there. So I booked up with an agency and the usual little minibus came along in the morning to pick me up. There were four others on the trip. One was a large French lady who had just spent a month on the seaside near Mombasa; her husband and son had gone off to Lusaka for a few days so she was taking this trip alone. There was a German lady who spoke nothing much besides German - There was a Dutch young lady, with large dark glasses, an impassive face, and a blue attache case that she kept held tightly to her all through the trip. It was not until we got to the Nakuru Park that the mystery of this case was unveiled. It contained a very fancy camera with all sorts of bulky attachments - zoom lenses and so forth. All obviously brand new. And the young lady showed at once that she did not really have much idea of how to handle them. She kept asking the driver where the flamingoes were, and wobbled her camera around. The results of her photography, I am certain, will be complete failures. Then there was a young teen age American, an agricultural student from Mississippi, whose father was a diplomat in Liberia. He was having a holiday on his own, and continuously asked foolish questions like : Do you have cows like this in France?

It was a three hour drive to Nakuru and after lunch, we went to the Lake, which is a National Park, at least on this side. There is a road that goes along the shore of the lake, about 200 metres inland, and every now and then there are lanes leading you down nearer to the waters edge. There are some observation Hides: we went to one. You approach it through a long narrow roofless tunnel of wood and bamboo. This leads you to a round cabin, with windows all round from which you can look at the water birds. There were masses of Pink Backed Pelicans, Sacred Ibis, African Fish Eagles, At another place, called Cormorant Point, there were thousands of White Necked Cormorants. We also saw some African Spoonbills with their red faces and legs, and at one point, very near the car, a Black Headed Heron, hunting on land.

No Flamingoes, though. And, alas, it started raining shortly after we got there, and this dampened our spirits and the expedition. The Dutch lady kept nagging the driver about Flamingoes; he did his best, but not a single one did we see there. On the way, however, we passed Lake Ermenteita, another Rift Valley Lake, and this had masses of Flamingoes on it. We were about a kilometre away from this Lake, so we could only see a pink cloud on the water, and just about make out what they were with binoculars. This was rather disappointing, but lets hope there will be other opportunities of visiting Nakuru in more auspicious circumstances.

Honeyguides by Z.F.

Honey-guides are an interesting group of birds and they are most useful to man. In Africa they are used as "Guides" by human beings to lead them to the nests of honey bees. In India there is only one species, the Orangecrumped Honeyguide (*Indicator xanthonotus*) though there are three races. S.A. Hussain of the Bombay Natural History Society spent a month and a half last May-June in Central and Western Bhutan studying these birds. His Report is available with the Bombay Natural Society. An interesting fact observed by Hussain is that "The birds fed only on the foundation wax adhering to the rock. They were not observed to attack the bees or attempt to reach at the wax in an active hive. The brown portion of the comb was totally ignored". Also, this species seems to be very territorial, each bird in possession as it were of a number of honey combs in a particular area. Hussain writes "As mentioned earlier 'Rml' seldom left the rock site except when chasing an alien Honeyguide. Every visiting Honeyguide was challenged by the resident bird. At the approach of a visiting Honeyguide, 'Rml' shows a great deal of agitation, by simultaneously flicking his wings, jerking his body restlessly and calling continuously. It then shuttles between perches A and B. occasionally 'dive bombing' the alien, and attempts to mount (female?) or chase it away (male?). On one occasion, after chasing an alien it flew in a slow circle in front of the rock uttering a call chaenp...chaenp.

Apart from 'Rml' at Honey Rock four other territorial males were noted at Chablekhola c. 2500 m (one). At Chablekhola (6 km north of Honey Rock) the resident male was observed for about 8 hours. During this time two alien birds visited and were chased away by the resident. At Bubja two males held territories about 50 m apart on a curved rocky hill side. The two territories were screened from one another by the jutting curve of the rock. One held six old combs and two active hives and the other contained 15 old combs

and 10 active hives. About 100 m down hill there was another spot with 15 active hives but no old combs. No bird was noticed there. The birds were observed for about 6 hours and though they did not leave their respective territories, no visiting Honeyguides were seen."

The New Dictionary of Birds says:- "Honeyguides are inhabitants of tropical forest and deciduous woodland, arboreal in their habits. They tend to be solitary; and they have a variety of calls, some of them harsh. Some species feed on insects, often caught on the wing, and also on bee larvae, honey, and particularly on bees wax; such 'cerophagy' appears to imply a metabolic use of wax unique among birds. Others, *Prodotiscus* spp., feed on waxy scale insects.

This beeswax feeding habit is associated with the 'guiding' of man and other mammals which gives the birds their name, although it is definitely known only for two of the species. For instance, the Blackthroated Honey guide Indicator indicator, which is widely distributed in tropical and southern Africa, although absent from the dense forest belts, guides man and ratsels (honey-badgers) to the nests of wild honeybees and, after a nest has been robbed, feeds on the remains and especially on the wax of the broken comb. This behaviour was doubtless first developed, before the advent of man, in association with ratsels, while the African human has deliberately made himself a substitute for the ratel as far as the bird is concerned. The bird, usually alone, begins by coming to a person or animal, uttering repeated churring notes, fanning its tail and otherwise making itself conspicuous; in this manner it leads the way towards the bees' nest, keeping some 15-20 feet ahead. When the bird hears or sees swarming bees, which is usually near a bees' nest, it perches silently and patiently until the robber has broken into the hive, taken his loot, and departed. The 'guiding' behaviour is purely instinctive and unplanned. The species is not solely dependent on this behaviour for its food, as it also catches insects. There is indeed evidence that guiding of humans is becoming less frequent in some areas, because the diminished interest in the honey of wild bees on the part of sophisticated Africans has caused the birds to disregard humans as potential foraging symbionts". Among the many economic uses of birds e.g. the production of guano, the destruction of pests, the pollination of flowers, the role of the Indicator must be valuable for dwellers in its mountain habitat.

Display of Richard's Pipit by Ananta Mitra

Some marshes in West Bengal are still a precarious existence.

On 15-2-76 I had been to one such marsh at Belaghata about 40 K.M. South-East of Calcutta. The fields surrounding it were covered with 'Kosari' (*Lathyrus sativa*). Here I had an opportunity of observing the display of Richard's Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*). Their display, unlike that of the Small Indian Skylark (*Alauda pulchra*), is generally missed by us. They too have a form of pretty dance with a song.

The bird starts its flight in a Zig Zag course at point no.1. It takes an angle of 45° and carries itself to another position at a height of about 5 feet. As it moves up to that position it utters a musical two - syllabled sound of 'Chiri-rip'. From here the bird wheels round to the opposite direction and soaring and floating at the same angle rises to position no.3, uttering the song of Chiri-rip. In this way it sings, dances and wheels its way up and up to 10 different positions, ultimately reaching a height of about 60 feet.

At the top position, the bird, like a Kathak dancer at 'Tatkar', keeps itself stationery in the air for about 10 to 15 seconds. With rapid flapping of wings it goes on singing Chiri riri, riri-riri - Chiri-riri riri-riri-riri - Chiri - riri, riri-riri- looking down to its admirers on the ground.

Suddenly, thereafter, it changes the rhythm and starts dropping down in a slanting line with the song continuing. The dropping too, is not continuous but is in a dancing form, with momentary pauses at stages 11, 12, 13 and 14.

With the last 'Chiri-riri' it lands and disappears in the thickets.

After taking rest for a short while the entire display is playfully repeated.

Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*) in Madras by V. Gantharam

I heard the Blyth's Reed Warbler, this winter, before seeing it, on 16th November, early on a foggy morning. It was perched on a

bougainvillea bush, on the other side of the street. The little brown bird announced its arrival with a series of 'tschuck tschuck' and 'Churr Churr's. I had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of this bird to record the exact date of its arrival, as I had been doing so for the past two years.

My first encounter with this small bird, which is about the size of the sparrow with olive-brown coat above and buffish below, and a pale supercilium above the eyes, had been on 3rd February 1976. I am most surprised why I had not seen or even heard this bird before, as I have come to know that it comes to India even before the commencement of winter.

Ever since I was determined to observe the migratory habits of this bird. I heard it last somewhere in the middle of April 1976. I heard it again on 22nd November and heard it last this time on 16th April, 1977.

I have not been able to observe the warbler very closely this winter as I had done so for the past two years on account of our shifting the house in June and the present house does not provide the warbler any natural habitat. But I am lucky to have the adjacent plot to ours open with some trees, plants and bushes and our opposite house with huge bougainvillea bushes and other trees which the warbler frequents. I have seen the warbler on thorn bushes along the banks of Adayar river, (which is one of my favourite birdwatching spots), deer park at Guindy and also in many other parts of South Madras.

Besides 'tschuck tschuck' and 'Churr Churr', the two very familiar calls of this warbler, it also has a peculiar whistle-like song, which I have heard three or four times. The first time I heard it was on a fine winter morning. Skipping from branch to branch of the margosa tree, with the tail feathers spread out as the early morning rays of the sun crept through the fog to the top of the tree, it burst into the song, which lasted for two minutes, with some intervals.

It has a swift way of skipping softly from branch to branch and would make a sudden pounce on an insect, hidden among the leaves. It would catch sight of another insect on a branch at a distance and suddenly flit to the branch, catch the prey and devour it. Though a shy bird and a skulker flying away as you approach it, I have watched it within a distance of three or four feet from my window.

It was on 4th February 1977, that I happened to witness a strange 'battle'. Just outside the window, where a bush over six foot high, I heard 'tschuck's of the warbler, in an unusual tone. Leaning forward, I caught sight of two warblers, apparently preparing for a 'battle'. The new-comer was being 'scolded' by the regular visitor and the other was 'returning the abuse'. They made strange gestures by slightly opening and closing their wings. This continued for a minute or two and then they took to their wings, one chasing the other. A little later I heard the 'owner' of the territory back on the margosa tree 'tschuck-ing' to himself over his victory. I had been able to witness this performance twice or thrice later. I have also seen a tailor bird chasing the warbler once.

Now that the warbler is back, I can still hear its 'tschuck's and 'Churr's through my open window and catch a glimpse of it on a branch of the bougainvillaea, among clusters of red, orange and violet flowers.

Rare Pheasant Located in Pakistan (Courtesy World Wildlife Fund)

Bombay - The Western Horned Tragopan, one of the most beautiful of the Himalayan Pheasants, may not be as near to extinction as feared, according to a report received by the World Wildlife Fund.

A survey in the bird's habitat in the northern mountains of Pakistan located 70 specimens in a 41 square kilometre area of Azad Kashmir (North East Pakistan), and Mr. Z.E. Mirza, Administrator of World Wildlife Fund - Pakistan, describes the situation as "very satisfactory".

Poaching is still a problem but the Wildlife Department has done well in controlling it, according to Mr. Mirza.

The survey showed that the bird may be extinct in the Kaghan Valley, where it used to be found.

The collapse in numbers is attributed to destruction of hill forests and human disturbance as well as excessive hunting.

The Western Horned Tragopan (Tragopan melanocephalus) is about 70 centimetres long and the male has a black head and crest, red face and neck, and with the back grey and black with white spots.

It has a striking bare purplish blue throat which it expands like a fan during its mating display.

A single female tragopan is in captivity in England and it is hoped that a male can be obtained for breeding.

Reports from India indicate that the bird may also be found in some parts of India.

Correspondence

Hoopoes in High Himalayas

S.K. Reeves

The note by SS Saini in the September Issue of the Newsletter, entitled 'Hoopoes in High Himalayas', caught my eye, because one remembers the Hoopoe as a bird of the Plains and did not associate it with high, mountainous regions.

The writer speaks of having seen Hoopoes at an altitude of 3700 m, and says he does not know whether it is common for Hoopoes to migrate to such heights.

In respect of the Tibetan Hoopoe (*Upupa epops saturata*), which is doubtless the form the writer encountered, Ali and Ripley in the 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan', Vol. 4, P.127 say that it is found above c.1700 m; has been recorded up to c.4400 m in summer and once at 5000 m in October. When dealing with the migration of the European form (*epops*) on P.125, they say that continuing observations by mountaineers indicate that some extralimital migration of Hoopoes (not sub-specifically identified) occurs directly across the Himalayas. The species has been frequently reported at high altitudes, notably at c.6400 m by the first Mount Everest Expedition in September and on the Pomori Glacier, c.5790 m in Nepal in May. In the last case, the form was identified as *saturata* (Biswas, JBNHS 56, 116). They say that the European form as a resident or breeding summer visitor is found in the Himalayas from the foothills to c.4600 m.

Referring to the Tibetan form, Salim Ali mentions in 'The Birds of Sikkim', P.79, specimens having been procured at 13000 ft. in May and c.16500 ft. in October. Stuart Baker lends support to this by

stating in his 'Nidification of the Birds of the Indian Empire', Vol.III, P.444 that "it breeds certainly up to 14000 ft. and almost certainly up to 16000 ft.

Finally, in the 'Birds of Nepal', P.128, Flemming, Flemming and Mongdol give the range of the Hoopoe as 120-5795 m. The authors do not identify any particular sub-species.

Damage to Sorghum by Ashycrowned Finch-Lark

H. Shivanarayan

Salim Ali (Handbook of the birds of India Pakistan, 1972, Vol.5) described the food of Ashycrowned Finch-Lark (Eremopterix ~~aripoo~~) as grass and weed seeds, weevils and other insects. We however found, during a survey for the bird pests of sorghum in Karimnagar District (Andhra Pradesh), that the Ashycrowned Finch-Lark damaged standing sorghum crop. The birds, moving in pairs, alighted on sorghum plant and fed on grains which were in milky stage. A bird was then shot with an air-gun and the gut contents revealed twenty six full grains and a few broken pieces of sorghum. Our observation thus indicates that sorghum grain is also a source of food in this species of lark. Although the Ashycrowned Finch-Lark can essentially be considered as an useful bird, the inclusion of sorghum grains in its diet can not be overlooked. It may be that when the natural food supply becomes insufficient, the bird supplements the diet with other sources of food items.

Chasing Partridges on Horse back

AL

Major M Mirza, formerly Commandant of the Presidents Bodyguard, gave me an interesting account of how they chase and catch Partridges in Jaipur. Apparently a Partridge cannot fly for a longer distance than three flight stretches at a time. Within the distance of a mile it is exhausted and after it lands on the ground at the third hop the horsemen dismount and catch the birds. There is a pair of Grey Partridge in our garden and recently I have also acquired a horse; but the terrain here is not suitable for this exciting sport.

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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas by Salim Ali
with 37 Colour Plates Illustrating 366 Species, Oxford Univer-
sity Press, Delhi 1977

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Subscriptions and Donations

Birding in Dacca By Reza Khan

Dacca - the capital of a new nation Bangladesh - is as developed as any other growing city of the Sub-Continent and almost equally congested and overcrowded. The only place within city limits where one can feel some cool soothing air, little laden with pollutants is the half a century old Ramna Park. The Park has a variety of indigenous plants with some ornamental gymnospermic ones, other than the seasonal flowering plants. A half kilometer lake covers one side of the park. Next to the park there is another open area - the erstwhile race course now known as Suharwardy Uddyan - about five square kilometers which is just coming up with saplings of indigenous and exotic species.

Before taking up a Fellowship of the Salim Ali-Loke Wan Tho Ornithological Research Fund of the Bombay Natural History Society in 1974 I had occasion to visit Ramna Park. But I doubt if I was ever able to spot 45 different species of birds in one birdwatching trip. Last December I returned from Bombay and on the eleventh of December I did some good birding at Ramna.

Jungle experience acquired in the "shola" forests of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu made my ears sensitive to bird calls. Possibly because of this I could record the presence of Redbreasted, Blacknaped and Greyheaded Flycatcher; Dull Green Leaf, Tickell's Leaf, Blyth's Reed and Great Reed Warblers; Purplerumped Sunbird and Tickell's Flowerpecker. As usual the Great Reed Warblers were partial to the lake. There were clumps of reeds and ornamental bamboos along the edge of water where they were flitting for insects and caterpillars.

A few Loranthus (green, exploding type of flowers) on Mango and Mulberry plants served as host for nectar-feeders and insect eaters like Sunbirds, Flowerpeckers, Grey Tits, Tailor Birds, Common Ioras, Warblers, and Flycatchers. One male Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike was also found gleaning the leaves. All the figs (Ficus bengalensis and F. religiosa included) were at the end of fruiting, but they supported a number of Coppermouths, Lineated Barbets, Redvented Bulbuls, Koels, and Myna. The Redvented Bulbul and the Greyheaded Myna appeared to be partial to Accacia monaliformes trees which were fruiting at that time. The Redwhiskered Bulbul appeared to be very rare

in the Park although they are found in the outskirts co-existing with the Redvented species. According to Prof. K. Z. Husain, Ex-Chairman of the Department of Zoology, University of Dacca, the Purple Sunbird and White-eyes as well as the Redwhiskered Bulbuls were common in the small thickets of the city a decade ago. Now thickets have disappeared because of urbanisation pushing the birds to the suburb some 30 Km away from the city.

Among the Woodpeckers, the Lesser Goldenbacked was quite common. Although there may not be too many of these but their drumming noise, conspicuous undulating flight, and the habit of frequent changing of the perching posts, made them prominent. I have my share of luck for a Fulvousbreasted Pied Woodpecker allowed me close observation. This species is not too common in these parts.

The sky over Dacca always harbours a large number of Pariah Kites and they are found over the Park too. In one of the tall figs there was a nest of a Kite with one grown up chick. It is rather rare to see Brahminy Kites here. But I saw one soaring with the Pariahs. Probably they come down to the lake for fishing. There is a resident pair of Spotted Owlets dozing most of the time in the natural holes of a tall Mahua tree.

Although the migratory Brown Shrike had out numbered the resident Blackheaded Shrike they seemed to be very wary and did not permit close observation. I had a most exciting sight of a migratory Wryneck hopping on the ground and picking up insects. I went almost within a meter of the bird and it did not object. Later on it flew to a Mimosops sapling and remained there for quite a while.

Blackheaded Orioles were not uncommon. The same was the case with Common Bee-eaters. A pair of Blue Jays appeared to be resident in the Park. Like any public place Ramna is heavily infested by both the species of crows, and Common, Pied, Jungle and Greyheaded mynas. A good number of Palm Swifts and a few House Swifts were found hawking insects. Common and Whitebreasted Kingfishers, Whitebreasted Water Hens, Pond Herons, White and Grey Wagtails were noticed on the banks of the lake. There was a party of Jungle Babblers, a few Black Drongos and Ashy Wren Warblers close to the hedges and thickets.

From my first visit to the Park I expected that there should be at least some 60* species of birds both resident and migratory. It is really a good refugium for the birds and also a birdwatchers' paradise.

Highlights of some Birding in India by Oliver M Ashford

My wife and I recently had the good fortune to spend 12 days in India as a welcome break in the long return trip to England from a visit to Papua New Guinea. As the main purpose of our Indian sojourn was to visit friends (mainly in the company of Miss Anna Mani, a contributor to the Newsletter), our itinerary was dictated by where people live rather than by the location of good places for bird-watching. Previous visits to India had however led us to expect to see interesting birds even in the proximity of large cities - and we were not disappointed.

To the bird-watching community Madras should be thought of as the nearest international airport to the bird sanctuary at Vedantangal, our first port of call. The main sanctuary is a shallow lake about half a mile in diameter dotted with clumps of trees. Along the western shore is a raised tree-lined path or bund from which the visitor can observe the birds without disturbing them. The sight of the multitude of herons, storks, ibises, pelican,, egrets, cormorants and ducks which greets one on climbing up to the bund is almost overwhelming. The greatest activity occurs in the early morning and late afternoon. Just before sunrise flock after flock of the water birds take off to search for food in the neighbouring paddy fields. The whirr of their wings diverts attention from the shrill ascending notes of a Keel or the insistent plonk plonk of a Coppersmith. As the sun sinks in the west, the reverse process takes place and the sky is filled with birds returning to spend the night in the trees. From the southern end of the bund we saw a large number of waders, varying in size from the Little Stint scampering along on its short black legs to the Black-winged Stilt prancing proudly on its long red matchsticks. The Yellow-Wattled Lapwings were also conspicuous and we were interested to compare them with the rather similar Masked Plover

* On February 12, 1978 the Bangladesh Bird Preservation Society released a check-list of the birds of the Ramna Park and listed some 70 species. The list was prepared from the field notes of Prof. K.Z. Husain, Mr. Nazrul Haque-an M.Phil. student, and from my own notes.

which we had seen in Papua New Guinea. In all, we saw about 70 species, not bad for 4 hours of birding.

Our next bird outing was in Bangalore with none other than the distinguished editor of the Newsletter, Zafar Futehally (this article fulfils a rash promise which I gave him in a moment of weakness!). Having enjoyed a morning's birding with Zafar some years ago in Borivli National Park near Bombay, I could appreciate his feeling that the surroundings of Bangalore are, in comparison, not very rich in birds. But to visitors like us, who so rarely have a chance to enjoy birding in India, Bangalore was nevertheless very rewarding. As mentioned in the February 1978 issue of the Newsletter, Zafar lives about 10 miles from the city in an agricultural area with a lake just 15 minutes on foot from his house. To illustrate the variety of bird life in his vicinity, let me list a few of the species which we saw between his house and the lake: Grey Partridge, Shikra, Golden Oriole, Blackwinged Kite, Rufoustailed and Ashycrowned Finch-Lark, Pied Kingfisher, Brown Shrike, Redwattled Lapwing and Spotted Owlet. A pair of the owlets were most obliging; they sat on a telegraph pole about 15 yards away and we were able to see every feather. We also had a tantalisingly short visit at midday to Bannerghatta, a place which clearly merits a more leisurely visit earlier in the day.

Our next stop was in Coimbatore, which from the point of view of a birdwatcher is mainly rewarding in that it is the gateway to a lovely part of the Nilgiris. What a wonderful time we had exploring the green sholas near Dobacamund and, more especially, around Coonoor! It was here that we had the good fortune to meet a keen bird-watcher, Mrs. P.M. Joseph, and through her a young student of Dr. Salim Ali, Mr. R. Sugathan. Thanks to his intimate knowledge of the local birds we were able to hear, see and identify (I came, I saw, I identified!) many species that would otherwise have escaped us.

This was the first time I had been in the Nilgiris - I hope it will not be the last! As the land has proved to be very suitable for growing tea, coffee and other valuable crops, the area left under native forest is unfortunately very small and I had the impression that even the few sholas which still remain are rapidly disappearing. Let us hope that the cutting down of trees will be stopped before it is too late. The bird life includes some of the most beautiful species I have seen anywhere in the world; they must be preserved!

In the course of our descent on the main road from Coonoor to Coimbatore, we saw an impressive variety of colourful and exciting birds. What could be more beautiful than a pair of Orange Minivets flitting like red and yellow flowers in a dark green tree? What a thrill to see two Scimitar Babblers playing follow the leader, a Brown-crowned Pygmy Woodpecker busily digging into the bark of a nearby bough in search of its food, and a Blue-headed Rock Thrush contemplating the scene from its perch on a branch in the same tree! Not far away was our first Malabar Whistling Thrush standing on a boulder below a waterfall. A few miles down the hill a flash of blue through the trees left us wondering; the problem was solved a few minutes later when the same bird flew past again and landed on a tree thereby enabling us to confirm that it was a Blue-winged Parakeet. Fairly! Bluebirds displayed their brilliant shades of black and blue on several occasions, Black Eagles soared majestically overhead with their wings curved upwards at the tips and a great Indian Hornbill flew leisurely past. Wherever we stopped there was something beautiful, something exciting and something new. It was truly one of the most memorable mornings of my life.

I have always suspected that bird-watching must be infectious. Now I know that it is. Our driver who looked at us with amazement when we first asked him to stop on our way up to Coonoor so that we could see some birds became more and more interested. On our fourth and last day with him it he who called our attention to several birds, including the Malabar Whistling Thrush! I hope that the next bird-watchers who have the good fortune to drive with him will continue to stimulate his interest. The more people in the world that come to appreciate birds, the easier it will be to ensure their survival.

A Note on Moults at Lammasinghi by K.S.R. Krishna Raju

A small study of moults in a few bird species was made during the banding operations of migratory birds at Lammasinghi (AP) and at Point Calimere (Tamil Nadu). Migratory birds that were netted for banding were examined for moults and it was found that only in *Phylloscopus* spp and the Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) was there extensive moults (during March-April).

In resident birds it was more a case of noticing moults, though there was undoubtedly no wing moults in most birds handled.

However, Alcippe poioicephala appears to begin its moult at the end of March, beginning of April; a bird trapped on 25th March had two innermost primaries growing. All birds caught after the 8th April were in wing moult; the two trapped on 16th April having new inner two primaries and the rest growing.

The Tailor bird (Orthotomus sutorius) appears to have a tail moult now, when the long feather of the male develops. In some specimens only these feathers were growing while others were in full wing and tail moult. Whether the first condition is just a preliminary stage of the second, or represents an age difference or some other condition is not known. Only a few birds were in full moult, many in full tail moult (March-April 72).

Dull Green Leaf Warbler (Phylloscopus trochiloides): These birds were abundant in March and numerous during the first half of April at Lammasinghi. From the moult cards it seems the moult will be complete in most birds by May by which time they will be able to leave for the breeding grounds. Possibly the birds leave as soon as, or before the moult is quite complete which may account for no birds in fresh plumage being caught in the mist nets., although one Largebilled Leaf Warbler (P. magnirostris) in completely fresh plumage was caught.

P. magnirostris: One bird on the 28th March had the wing almost new, signs of waxy sheath still showing on the 1st primary (aso) and the 6th Secondary(as). The tail was in full moult, the central feathers two thirds grown, the outer feathers in pin. One bird on the 10th April was in fresh plumage.

Yellowbrowed Leaf Warbler (Phylloscopus inornatus): 2 birds were trapped on 29th March. One was in heavy body moult and the other showed no signs of moult. This species is known to have full moult in July/August in its breeding grounds.

Lanius cristatus: From the limited evidence (2birds each at PTC and at LMS) it appears the birds further South will complete their moult more quickly. It seems strange that these winter visitors are in such late moult, but it is possible that only birds in moult remaining in the area are being trapped.

It is evident from the field observations made and the data recorded that there is great scope for Ornithologists in India to learn more about the connection between the moult and the migratory movements of birds. A detailed study of moult at a station for a considerable period would perhaps give us an insight that might be

useful in explaining the migratory movements of some bird species and may also help us to establish a connection between some ecological limiting factors such as food and the migratory movements and the moult. All this, needless to say, involves a full fledged scheme which is needed urgently in India.

"Lake of Million Flamingoes" saved again (Courtesy World Wildlife Fund - India)

Bombay - A factory producing an agricultural chemical which poses a threat to Lake Nakuru, famed as the Lake of a Million Flamingoes, is to be moved, the Government of Kenya has informed the World Wildlife Fund.

The World Wildlife Fund has congratulated the Government on its decision and said that it hoped that the factory would be moved speedily. It also praised the Government for its concurrent policy decision that only industries which do not produce harmful pollutants should be located in the Nakuru area.

The factory began last year producing Copper oxychloride which is used to destroy pest algae. An accident permitting its escape into the lake could destroy the blue-green algae, abundant minute plant organisms which are the staple food of the Lesser Flamingo (Phoeniconaias minor) and fish, crustacea and many insects. Well over a million flamingo may gather there, creating what Dr. Roger Tory Peterson, the famed American ornithologist, has described as "the greatest bird spectacle in the world".

In 1973 a World Wildlife Fund children's campaign in Europe raised over \$500,000 to enable the Kenya authorities to buy up land around Lake Nakuru to protect it from pollution. The expanded National Park also protects a wide range of terrestrial wildlife, including Rhinoceros, Antelope, Leopard, and Black and White colobus monkey.

Correspondence

Miss Rekha Shukla

We put some bricks on the wall of our terrace and made a home for the Indian Robin which was in the search of a nesting site. We found the

eggs and two chicks afterwards. Whenever we heard the Robin's call of anger, we came out and every time we found pigeons sitting near its nest. One day we heard the angry call. My brother went out and found a black chick on the ground - dying. Then he saw a female House Sparrow coming out of the hole. Can any one confirm that the House Sparrows are in the habit of throwing somebody else's chicks out of their nest?

Book Review

Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas by Salim Ali with 37 Colour Plates Illustrating 366 Species, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1977

Salim Ali continues to be active both in the field and at his desk. His latest book A Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas is a small but well packed volume, with coloured illustrations and descriptions of 366 species. The handsome cover shows four different species of drongos, sitting in an amicable row on a telephone wire. Unfortunately its price at Rs.80/- will be beyond the reach of many in this inflation ridden world.

The Birds of Sikkim now out of print, described approximately 400 species, and much of the information had never been published before. It was a big book, too bulky to be put into a knapsack. The present volume describes 366 species but is compact and terse and can go into a large pocket. The book was published with the help of the late King of Bhutan, His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, a great nature lover who made a substantial grant towards the cost of publication and made all the bundobost for travelling and camping in his "supremely fascinating but logistically difficult kingdom".

The Field Guide will be useful not only to the wanderer in the Himalayas but also to more sedentary people in the plains, for a large number of species can be seen even around our cities. By following the system of drawing attention by a line to the more conspicuous colour pattern in the make-up of a bird, or by pointing to one of its special features, the problem of identification has been simplified. In the case of Warblers, for example where identification is such a problem, the indication of the distinctive aspect of the bird is invaluable. It is heartening to find that along with well known artists with international reputations like Robert Schol, D.M. Henry and Paul Barruel, three Indians have also made the Salim Ali grade, and these include J.P. Irani, K.P. Jadav and Winston Creado. So here is another area where the monopoly of the foreigner is being ended.

One of my most memorable bird watching experiences was with Salim Ali in Bhutan, and I recognized then how terribly difficult it is to identify birds in these forested areas where the trees are over 50 metres tall, where the foliage is thick, and where the ground cover consists of stinging nettles which make it painful to crawl about in search of birds which have been shot for the collection. But in that superb environment, whenever your binoculars do manage to focus on a bird the sight is unforgettable. There is such a profusion of birds and many belonging to the same genera so similarly coloured, that one has to have a lightning response to distinguish between one species and another as they flit through the foliage. Under these circumstances a bird in the hand is essential for identification, and I recall many instances where Salim Ali refused to certify a species in the field in spite of a good view and confirmed the identity only after every aspect of the bird had been examined in the hand. I have often referred to the incident of the Longtail Sibia (*Heterophasia picaoides*) with the "white" foreheads. This bird is not supposed to have a white forehead but we saw a group which appeared to have this feature. In spite of seeing them on 3 different occasions Salim Ali refused to believe that this could be a new race. He waited until he was able to collect a specimen and he then discovered that the white 'marking' was just the pollen from white flowers. One of the things I have learnt by going out with Salim Ali in the field is not to trust my own eyes, nor my own judgement. ZF

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Naini Tal: Mr. Narendra Singh, Vienna Lodge, Ayarpatta, Carbett Marg, Pin 263001 Rs.15/-

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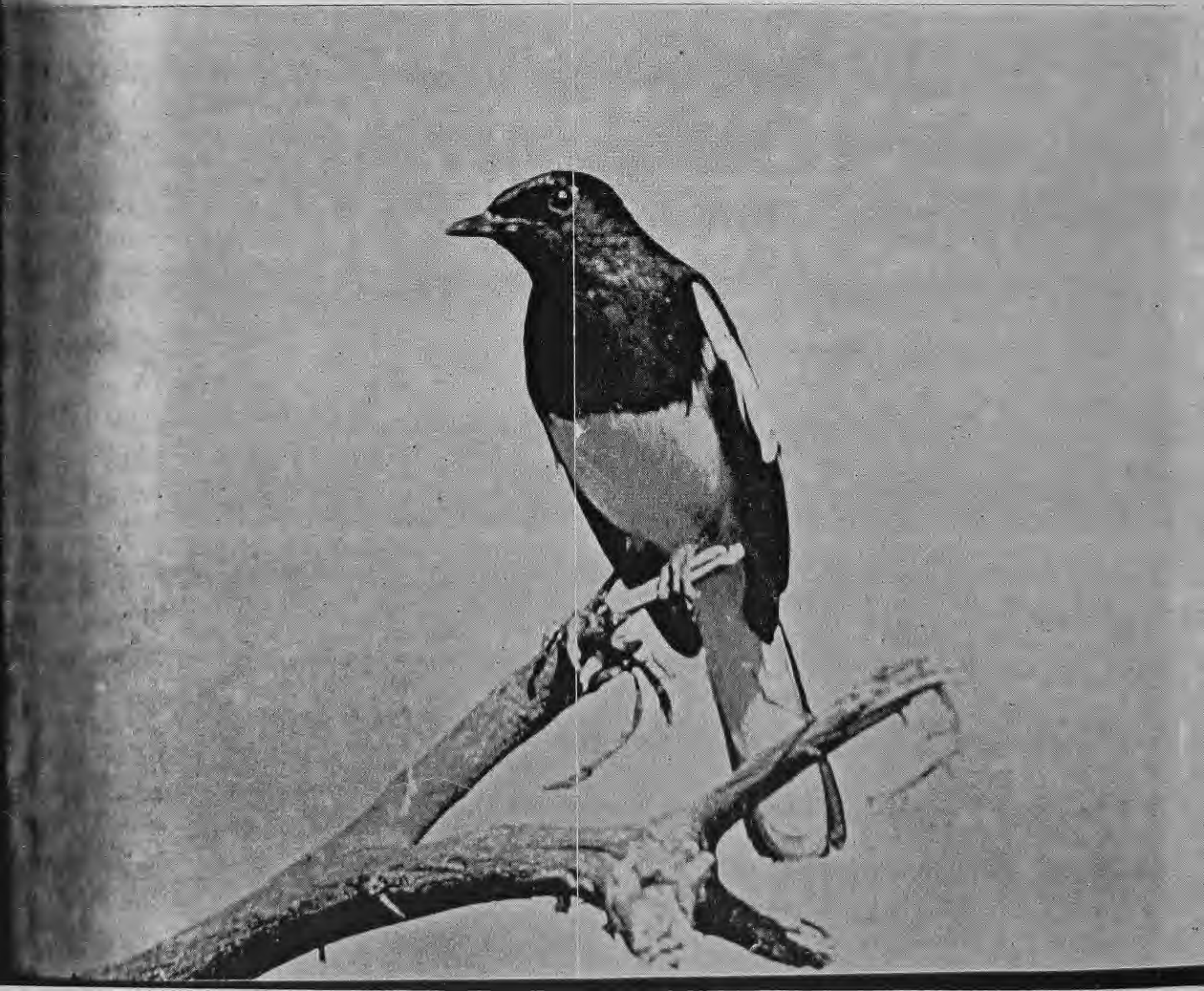
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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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N E S L E T T E R F O R
B I R D W A T C H E R S

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Editorial

Ornithology in Bandipur by Madhav Gadgil

Subscriptions and Donations

Editorial

The sole content of this issue is an article by Prof. Madhav Gadgil describing some of the field work done by him and his colleagues at Bandipur as part of the Wildlife Biology Programme. The Programme was initiated by the University Grants Commission in the wholly laudable attempt to interest and inform university students in the science of wildlife biology. Many such intentions never took off the ground because of the lack of suitable teachers and adequate motivation of prospective students. The intention of the University Grants Commission to initiate this Course would not have succeeded but for the energy and competence of Madhav Gadgil who managed to get the co-operation of his own institute, the Indian Institute of Science, as well as the co-operation of the Forest Department, the World Wildlife Fund, the Madurai University, the Bombay Natural History Society and a number of others who co-operated at the fringes once the hard core of the work was provided by Gadgil and his colleagues.

The article which follows indicates the rich possibilities which we have in India to do valuable field work on evolution, behaviour, genetics and the other fundamentals of biology through the medium of birds. Several possibilities have been indicated by Gadgil and it is to be hoped that the readers of this Newsletter will seriously involve in some of these enquiries.

The study of birds automatically results in a study of the environment in general. Let us look at some of the problems posed by Gadgil: he says that no where else but in India is there such a large assortment of exclusively fruit eating birds and this has happened because we have a large number of fruit bearing trees. We know that many of our jungle tribes live in the forests on berries and fruits and that this provides them with a very satisfactory diet. The listing of such trees should be an interesting Project. We have all witnessed the way in which certain birds resent the presence of others on the same tree. Madhav suggests that the resentment is in proportion to the overlapping of the food habits of the species concerned at a particular season. The configuration of birds and the extent to which their shape and size assists or comes in the way of their normal life styles is another subject which would provide the basis for careful observations of every species.

Biology is for the Birds!

Seventeen of us had the good fortune to spend a period of eighty days in the Tiger Reserve of Bandipur during the first three months of this year. Bandipur lies at an altitude of one thousand meters just where the Mysore plateau joins the Nilgiri hills. Perhaps some two hundred years ago, this area was a plain under cultivation as witness the numerous irrigation tanks strewn over the reserve. Depopulated, probably during Tipu's wars, the land was reclaimed by dry deciduous forest which has remained rather open with plenty of undergrowth and grass. The numerous tanks provided excellent water sources for the wild animals and the whole region became a rich wildlife area. The Mysore Maharajahs made it their hunting reserve and protected the forest well till it became a wildlife sanctuary and then a Project Tiger Reserve. The low open forest with its juxtaposition of woods and grassy glades and ponds with their bamboo-studded banks is an ideal habitat for elephants, gaur, chital, wild dog, panther and of course tiger. It is also a great habitat for birds of deciduous forest and one is guaranteed at least fifty species in a couple of days of bird-watching at Bandipur.

Of Woodpeckers

We spent quite a lot of time watching these hundred - odd species of birds, listed in the appendix, as a part of our scientific programme at Bandipur. A most striking component of this bird fauna is the Woodpecker guild. Bandipur can boast of no less than seven species of woodpeckers ranging in size from the pygmy to the majestic great black woodpecker. Their drumming is as much a part of Bandipur as the "kuk-kuk" calls of chital and the miouwing of the peafowl. The commonest species of woodpecker is the handsome goldenbacked. One has to look rather closely at this one, for there are three very similar species in Bandipur and its neighbourhood - the goldenbacked (Dinopium benghalense) the goldenbacked three-toed (Dinopium javanense) and the larger goldenbacked (Chrysocolaptes lucidus). A close look confirms that the Bandipur species is the goldenbacked threetoed woodpecker. The Handbook tells us that the goldenbacked affects lighter forests, plantations and gardens while the goldenbacked threetoed and larger goldenbacked both affect moist deciduous and evergreen forest.

We are quite familiar with the phenomenon of two similar species belonging to the same genus distributing themselves in somewhat different

habitats along an environmental gradient. Thus while Bandipur harbours the crimsonbreasted barbet (Megalaima haemacephala), the moister forests of Mudumalai harbour the very similar crimson-throated (Megalaima rubricapilla) species. The distribution of Dinopium benghalense in open forests and of Dinopium javanense in moister forests therefore falls in a well-known pattern. We believe that such pairs of species derived from a common ancestral stock, and on becoming adapted to divergent ecological conditions, diverged a little in appearance as well. The convergence in appearance of the goldenbacked threetoed (Dinopium javanense) and the larger goldenbacked (Chrysocolaptes lucidus) is a much more remarkable and less well-known phenomenon. Here the two species belong to different genera, and hence to different ancestral stocks. In the course of evolution they have come to occupy very similar habitats, often overlapping in range, and have evolved to converge in appearance, starting out from ancestors which no doubt looked much more different. This fascinating phenomenon is little known and studied, and although we could not really do more than note it this time, its detailed study promises to shed much light on evolutionary processes.

The Fruit-eaters

Another remarkably diverse group of birds at Bandipur is that of the frugivores. Our list shows no less than eighteen species of regular fruit-eaters: Green pigeon, three species of parakeets, lorikeet, koel, grey hornbill, small green barbet, coppersmith, five species of mynas, large cuckoo-shrike, goldfronted chloropsis and two species of bulbuls. Many of these, such as the green pigeon and the barbets, feed almost exclusively on fruit. This whole guild of fruit-eaters is essentially a tropical phenomenon. In the colder latitudes with harsh winters there cannot be a year-round supply of fruit, and hence no room for confirmed fruit-addicts. Our barbets, parakeets and flying foxes (fruit-bats) are therefore a unique phenomenon of much scientific interest.

The fruit-producing plants and the fruit-eating birds have evolved in step, and the greatest of the bird-fruit genus of plants is Ficus, to which belong peepal and banyan. The Ficus seed can happily germinate on the trunk of another tree or on a rocky ledge, and it is fruit-eating birds which serve to disperse the seeds through their droppings. At Bandipur we watched a number of Ficus trees fruit and watched the fruit being eagerly devoured by an army of birds. In the early months of January-February, a number of such trees came into fruit and we noted how the fruit crop grew and attracted birds maximally when the fruit was fully ripe. This is when the seed would be mature, and the birds reciprocate for the food provided by dispersing the ripe seed - a nicely

attuned process of natural benefit. And then in the last days of our stay we saw the process get out of gear. In mid-March a single Ficus tree fruited profusely on the campus next to the Vanashree lodge. There were no other fruiting trees in the vicinity and the whole greedy army of birds camped on this single tree for a period of four days and polished off the entire crop leaving not a single fruit to ripen. All the energy invested by the tree in the fruit-crop was thus a total waste. At the same time, if the birds had waited prudently allowing the fruit to ripen, they would have got much more out of it. But the blind, selfish competition amongst the birds would not allow this to happen.

We were able to devote but little time to this fascinating phenomenon. The energetics of fruit production and fruit consumption, and the co-evolution of fruit trees and fruit birds is a subject worthy of a detailed study, and India with its huge population of Ficus trees is the best place to undertake it.

They sip Nectar and Fight

Just as plants use birds to disperse seeds, they use them to pollinate flowers. The nectar secreted in such flowers serves as the attractant for the pollinators. Plants exercise a great economy in the production of such nectar, seemingly secreting not an iota more than absolutely necessary to attract the pollinators to the flowers. The amount necessary to attract the birds would depend on alternative sources of food available to the birds. It is therefore advantageous for bird flowers to bloom in a season in which other food sources are at a low level. This is precisely what the non-specialized bird flowers such as the silk cotton and flame of the forest do. They bloom in the dry season from December to March when the insect food of their major pollinators - the mynas - is at its minimum. They further enhance their attraction by advertising the blossom in a burst of mass flowering when the leaves are shed. And the birds do come to them in large flocks.

Our stay at Bandipur coincided with the blooming times of the silk cotton as well as the flame of the forest, and we spent long hours watching the birds at these trees. The major consumers of nectar were the white headed myna, jungle myna, Indian myna, small green and crimson-breasted barbets, redvented and redwhiskered bulbuls, the golden-fronted chloropsis and the maharatta and golden backed threetoed woodpeckers. Even the black drongo appeared to sip the nectar on occasion, though it mostly concentrated on the pursuit of flying insects. It

was obvious that nectar was in short supply and there was continuous squabbling amongst all the birds for a sip at the nectar. The squabbling never ended up in real blows, but took the form of visual and vocal threats followed by surrender of the disputed position on the tree by the submissive party.

The table given below analyses the intersections taking place amongst the different species involved. Most of the interactions are amongst the three commonest visitors - Jungle myna, Indian myna and White-headed myna.

Interactions among birds at a silk cotton tree (in percent of total interactions observed)

Submissive	Dominant	Indian Myna	Jungle Myna	White Headed Myna	Black Drongo	Green Barbet	Total
Indian Myna	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	1.0
Jungle Myna	20.6	9.2	0	2.5	1.0		33.3
White-headed Myna	15.7	8.7	8.2	10.8	0		43.4
Black Drongo	6.6	2.0	0	0.5	1.0		10.1
Green Barbet	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.0		4.5
Mahratta Woodpecker	0	0	2.0	0	0		2.0
Goldfronted Chloropsis	0	0	0	0.5	0		0.5
Redvented Bulbul	5.2	0	0	0	0		5.2
Total	50.1	20.4	10.7	14.8	4.0		100.0

It will be seen that intraspecific interactions are only a fourth as common as interspecific interactions. The Indian myna, in particular, is highly querulous bird and is responsible for the bulk of interspecific aggression as it vents its aggression almost exclusively on other species. The jungle and white-headed myna do squabble a great deal amongst themselves and most of the intraspecific disputes are restricted to these species. What struck us as most unusual, however, was the amount of flack that the black drongo took from the Indian myna. The black drongo is famous for its pugnacity, which is exhibited particularly in the vicinity of its nests. But on the silk cotton tree, the

Indian myna reigns supreme. The drongo rarely sips nectar, but comes to the tree primarily to hawk insects, particularly the honeybees. Its motivation for defending a particular perch is therefore unlikely to be as great as that of an Indian myna. It is perhaps this factor which tilts the scales in favour of the myna - which is by no means a mean fighter on its own merit.

The Bandits

Plants have evolved a mutually beneficial relationship as pollinators and seed dispersers with many birds - bulbuls, barbets, sunbirds and mynas. These birds utilize the limited amount of pulp nectar made available by the plants and serve to disperse the seed or affect pollination. But there is another set of birds who are not willing to rest content with what the plants provide; rather they want to exact a tribute from the plants without rendering any service in return. They have developed a most formidable weapon in a strong beak in order to achieve this end. These bandits are of course the green jewels of the tropical forests - the parakeets. With their strong beaks, the parakeets are capable not only of feeding on the soft pulp which the plants provide as an inducement for the birds to disperse seeds, but can break through and eat the seeds as well. Similarly, at a silk cotton tree or on a flame of the forest, the parakeets not only go for the nectar but feed on buds and petals as well, destroying thousands of flowers in the process. The plants seem to have no effective defense against these bandits and have to suffer their depredations. And parakeets are a most successful group of birds at Bandipur with large populations of three species - roseringed, blossomheaded and blue-winged. What effects they have on the ecosystem is a fascinating problem that needs an in-depth investigation.

Birds of a Feather

We have mentioned a number of birds so far, and each one of them is characterized by some specific social habits. The goldenbacked, three toed woodpeckers largely occur in pairs, as do the Indian and jungle mynas. The whiteheaded myna occur in small flocks and so do all the three species of parakeets. Each of these social habits must have an adaptive significance posing yet another challenging problem for the biologist. We ourselves made some interesting observations on the flocking behaviour of two other species - the jungle crow and the spotted dove.

The jungle crows do not sleep at Bandipur - they have a roost outside the Tiger Reserve in a nearby village. From there they fly into Bandipur

very early in the morning, in loose straggling flocks. Then they start looking for food, loosely spread out over the forest. It is evident that they keep in touch with each other all the while. One of their choicest foods at Bandipur is pieces of meat at a kill made by a predator such as a wild dog. The jungle crows keep a sharp lookout for the predators, and invariably follow them if the predators are out on a prowl. They also search out the kills and having found a kill fly and call around it in a most characteristic fashion. The tribals use crows as infallible guides in locating the kills, and no doubt other crows can do the same. A flock of crows therefore builds up very rapidly once one or more crows discover a kill. They feed on the morsels available till these are exhausted, when they disperse once more. The flock is thus not a permanent entity at all, but builds up and breaks down opportunistically. Such flocking behaviour seems geared towards proper utilization of resources which occur patchily in an unpredictable fashion.

Spotted dove was another bird we looked at closely. We noticed that in their flocks there were two types of birds - those with the bright white and black chessboard on the neck, and those without. Observations of the courting and mating behaviour suggest the possibility that the birds lacking the chessboard, somewhat smaller in size are the females. This is something which needs to be investigated further. While feeding the doves often formed large flocks on the road. These were circular in shape with the presumptive females largely inside the circle. The flock moved in a constant direction. Now, it is known from the studies on wood pigeons that not all the birds in a flock can feed equally well, but rather those in certain positions get pushed around continually and get less time to feed. It was found that in these spotted doves the peripheral individuals made an average of 77 pecks per minute, while the central areas made 82 pecks per minute.

Death comes early in the Tropics

We also had a look at several spotted and ring dove nests. The nest would be made the eggs laid and we would expectantly watch for further developments. And, alas, the eggs would be gobbled up by some predator. Not a single dove nest that we saw could succeed. This falls in line with the accumulating evidence that mortality of eggs and chicks is considerably higher in the tropics than in the temperate zones. On the other hand, the adults in the tropics seem much less susceptible to predation than are the adult birds that breed in the colder latitudes, whether they later migrate or not. This generalization, if substantiated, has many important implications for our understanding of

of ecological processes. It may tell us why tropical birds have smaller clutches, whether the adults are expected to be more acute competition with each other, whether the ecological requirements of tropical birds are expected to be narrower and so on. There is hardly any data today on mortality in the egg and nesting stages of Indian birds, and no data at all on the mortality of adults. Only a long term study based on individually identifiable colour-ringed birds will tell us more.

In contrast to the spotted dove, the house sparrows of Bandipur had excellent nesting success. We observed three nests of the house sparrow from beginning to fledging. One of these had a clutch of 4 and the other two clutches of three each, and the entire broods were raised successfully. These house sparrows bred inside a hut in rather protected situations, and their nesting success may be rather atypical, but this needs to be examined further. A very interesting point that emerged out of the sparrow study was that although the sparrows are monogamous, the males and the females do not share the burden of rearing the chicks equally. This was consistently so in case of all the three nests investigated. In all cases female made roughly 55% of the trips to the nest, while the male made about 45%. In addition the female came to the nest with food in 90% out of her trips. The male, on the other hand brought food only in about 80% of the trips. If we assume that the male and female bring about the same average quantity of food, then the male is sharing only about 40% of the burden of feeding the chicks. In addition, the male was always much more cautious of his each visit to the nest.

This is another very interesting finding in view of the recent theoretical developments in sociobiology. We now realize that the relations between members of a mated pair or between parents and offspring are made up of elements of both co-operation and conflict. At the same time that the male and female are co-operating in fulfilling the shared goal, each partner may be trying to get the maximum out of the other, and trying to give out the minimum feasible. An analysis of the relationship of the male and female at such a game has proved most illuminating. We now believe that in most cases, even of monogamy, the males come out of the game making a smaller contribution to the task of rearing the offspring as they have the female at a disadvantage because of her initial heavier investment in reproduction. Our sparrow results are therefore worthy of further pursuit.

The Long Tail

So we come to the last part of our narrative which shall deal, appropriately enough, with tails - and rather long ones at that. The longest tail

of all or rather the longest train made up of upper tail coverts - belong to the peacock. Surprisingly enough we know little about the breeding behaviour of our national bird. It is however clear that the peacock practices polygamy - he has many wives and also that he apparently does nothing for his own chicks - not even the 40% that the male house sparrow puts in. In this polygynous system, not all males can mate, and this introduces a tremendous competition amongst the males for acquisition for a harem. The success of the males in this endeavour apparently rests on their being able to dazzle the females by showing off their great trains. We spent a lot of time observing peacocks in different stages of growth of train and it is evident that the long train of a peacock is a serious disadvantage to it in flight. A long tailed male cannot take off the ground quickly, nor can he manoeuvre properly once up in air. At least on the surface, it appears as if the long trained males are severely handicapped. Why should the females then bestow their favours on these handicapped creatures? The speculation is that a male which is alive and kicking in spite of tremendous handicap must obviously be a vigorous individual and therefore should rank high in female's view. Just as social pressures for showing off have led to the practice of spending exorbitant sums on wedding ceremonies which leave the bride's parents in debt for years to come, pressures for showing off before the females have forced the peacocks into developing an enormous train which in every way is a serious drain on their resources.

This notion of selection for a handicap is another new and interesting development in sociobiology. It would be very much worthwhile testing this out carefully in the field by an investigation of the mortality rates and reproductive success in peacocks with different lengths of trains - and following this over a few generations.

The drongos are another group of longtailed birds, but the long tail here is persistent round the year and common to both sexes. It does not seem to serve a display function and is probably not a handicap, but rather an asset in the drongo's normal business of life. Prof. R. Narasimha, our aeronautical engineer who visited us at Bandipur spent a long time watching the black drongos hawk insects from a telegraph wire near the Bandipur tank. These sallies are remarkable for their twists and turns in mid-air, and Professor Narasimha speculated that the long, bifurcated tail may play a critical role in enhancing manoeuvrability. The point to be stressed here is that by simply looking at the bird, we could not have guessed at the function of its tail. This was possible only after watching it in the field.

The Moral

The moral of this long tale is that as students of biology, we could learn a tremendous amount from the birds. Birds have played a critical role in the development of much of modern biology at the level of organism as a whole. Many giants of modern biology - Ernst Mayr, Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, David Lack and Robert Mac Arthur, to name a few, have been ornithologists. It is through their studies on birds that we have gained most of our understanding of evolutionary, ecological and behavioural processes. Sadly enough, our biology curricula pay scant attention to these exciting fields, concentrating instead on a dull, repititious study of dead structure. Our zoology students spend endless hours dissecting dead rats, cockroaches and earthworms - and from there they graduate to dissecting more dead rats and cockroaches and earthworms but now with a dead lizard or a scorpion or a pigeon thrown in. They are never encouraged to look outside the laboratory and observe the rich drama of tropical life going on all around us.

This is a great pity. Half of a modern biology curriculum should deal with the molecular and physiological level and the laboratory exercises should deal with interesting experiments illuminating these fields. The other half should deal with ecology, behaviour and evolution - and the practical training should almost entirely concern itself with field work. To understand their proper context, ecological and behavioural observations should be made under natural conditions - conditions under which the organism has evolved. And birds, along with squirrels, monkeys, bats and lizards provide the richest and most easily accessible material for Indian students of biology for conducting their field work.

Our own major emphasis at Bandipur was not on birds. Nevertheless, we did spend some time watching the birds, and out of these observations emerged a number of interesting ideas. We have presented above a selection of these covering a spectrum of biology ranging over biogeography, evolutionary theory, community and population ecology, behaviour and sociobiology. Hopefully, we have made a convincing enough case for the claim that we can teach, learn, and do serious research in modern biology by just watching the birds in their natural setting.

Most of the readers of this Newsletter would not be professional biologists - which is wonderful in that amateur bird^d watchers, besides enjoying themselves have made remarkable contributions to science. It is also a tragedy in that so few of our professional biologists are interested in learning about, and exploiting the rich teaching and research potential of our bird fauna. Our course at Bandipur was perhaps

one hopeful sign that this apathy is slowly dissolving, and that our scientific community is waking up to the challenge of the winged bipeds. Very soon, let us hope, it will be ringing with cries of - biology is for the birds!

Acknowledgements

We wish to conclude by expressing our gratitude to the many people and organizations which made our interesting experience at Bandipur possible: The University Grants Commission, particularly Dr. D. Shankar Narayan, the Ministry of Agriculture in the Central Government - particularly Shri. N.D. Jayal, the Karnataka Forest Department - particularly Shri G.R. Mavinkurve, the Tamilnadu Forest Department - particularly Shri S.A. Rahamatullah, Shri John Joseph and Shri Mangalraj Johnson, the World Wildlife Fund - particularly Shri. M.A. Parthasarathy and Shri Zafar Futehally and the Indian Institute of Science - particularly Dr. N. Mukunda and Dr. Sulochana Gadgil. This is just a partial list of the many people who made our enriching experience possible, and to all of them we are grateful.

Appendix

A checklist of birds of Bandipur

1. Little Grebe (Podiceps ruficollis) 2. Pond Heron (Ardeola grayii)
3. Whitenecked Stork (Ciconia episcopus) 4. Lesser Whistling Teal (Dendrocygna javanica) 5. Spotbill Duck (Anas poecilorhyncha) 6. Blackwinged Kite (Elanus caeruleus) 7. Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans)
8. Shikra (Accipiter badius) 9. Crested Hawk-Eagle (Spizaetus cirrhatus) 10. King Vulture (Torgos calvus) 11. Longbilled Vulture (Gyps indicus) 12. Whitebacked Vulture (Gyps bengalensis) 13. Crested Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela) 14. Grey Partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus) 15. Jungle Bush Quail (Perdica asiatica) 16. Gray Junglefowl (Gallus sonneratii) 17. Indian Peafowl (Pavo cristatus)
18. Bustard-Quail (Turnix suscitator) 19. Whitebreasted Waterhen (Amaurornis phoenicurus) 20. Indian Moorhen (Gallinula chloropus)
21. Redwattled Lapwing (Vanellus indicus) 22. Yellow-wattled Lapwing (Vanellus malabaricus) 23. Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos) 24. Blackwinged Stilt (Himantopus himantopus) 25. Stone Curlew (Burhinus oedicephalus) 26. Green Pigeon (Treron phoenicoptera) 27. Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) 28. Spotted Dove (Streptopelia chinensis)
29. Little Brown Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis) 30. Emerald Dove (Chalcophaps indica) 31. Roseringed Parakeet (Psittacula krameri)

32. Bluewinged Parakeet (Psittacula columboides) 33. Blossomheaded Parakeet (Psittacula cyanocephala) 34. Common Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus varius) 35. Indian Lorikeet (Loriculus vernalis) 36. Koel (Eudynamis scolopacea) 37. Gro-Pheasant (Centropus sinensis) 38. Spotted Owlet (Athene brama) 39. Nightjar (Caprimulgus asiaticus) 40. House Swift (Apus affinis) 41. Crested Tree Swift (Hemiprocne longipennis) 42. Small Blue Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) 43. Whitebreasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis) 44. Small Green Bee-eater (Merops orientalis) 45. Roller (Coracias benghalensis) 46. Hoopoe (Upupa epops) 47. Grey Hornbill (Tockus birostris) 48. Small Green Barbet (Megalaima viridis) 49. Crimsonbreasted Barbet (Megalaima haemacephala) 50. Wryneck (Jynx torquilla) 51. Rufous Woodpecker (Micropternus brachyurus) 52. Little Scalybellied Green Woodpecker (Picus myrmecophoneus) 53. Blacknaped Green Woodpecker (Picus canus) 54. Goldenbacked Threetoed Woodpecker (Dinopium javanense) 55. Great Black Woodpecker (Dryocopus javensis) 56. Mahratta Woodpecker (Dendrocopos mahrattensis) 57. Browncrowned Pygmy Woodpecker (Picoides nanus) 58. Pitta (Pitta brachyura) 59. Bush Lark (Mirafra assamica) 60. Redwinged Bush Lark (Mirafra erythroptera) 61. Small Skylark (Alauda gulgula) 62. Wiretailed Swallow (Hirundo smithii) 63. Redrumped Swallow (Hirundo daurica) 64. Baybacked Shrike (Lanius vittatus) 65. Rufousbacked Shrike (Lanius schach) 66. Brown Shrike (Lanius cristatus) 67. Blackheaded Oriole (Oriolus xanthornus) 68. Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) 69. Whitebellied Drongo (Dicrurus caerulescens) 70. Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus) 71. White-headed Myna (Sturnus malabaricus) 72. Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) 73. Rosy Pastor (Sturnus roseus) 74. Indian Myna (Acridotheres tristis) 75. Jungle Myna (Acridotheres fuscus) 76. Hill Myna (Gracula religiosa) 77. Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda) 78. Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) 79. Pied Flycatcher-Shrike (Hemipus picatus) 80. Wood Shrike (Tephrodornis pondicerianus) 81. Large Cuckoo-Shrike (Coracina novaehollandiae) 82. Orange Minivet (Pericrocotus flammeus) 83. Small Minivet (Pericrocotus cinnamomeus) 84. Indian Iora (Aegithina tiphia) 85. Goldenfronted Chloropsis (Chloropsis aurifrons) 86. Redwhiskered Bulbul (Pycnonotus jocosus) 87. Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer) 88. Whitecheeked Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys) 89. Scimitar Babbler (Pomatorhinus schisticeps) 90. Yellow-eyed Babbler (Chrysomma sinense) 91. Jungle Babbler (Turdoides striatus) 92. Whiteheaded Babbler (Turdoides affinis) 93. Redbreasted Flycatcher (Muscicapa parva) 94. Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura aureola) 95. Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) 96. Tailor Bird (Orthotomus sutorius) 97. Blyth's Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum) 98. Lesser Whitethroat (Sylvia curruca) 99. Magpie-Robin (Coosychus saularis) 100. Pied Bushchat (Saxicola caprata) 101. Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata) 102. Blue Rock Thrush (Monticola solitarius) 103. Blackbird (Turdus merula) 104. Grey Tit (Parus major) 105. Chestnutbellied Nuthatch (Sitta castanea) 106. Velvetfronted Nuthatch (Sitta frontalis) 107. Tawny Pipit (Anthus campestris) 108. Grey Wagtail

(Motacilla caspica) 109. White Wagtail (Motacilla alba) 110. Purplorumped Sunbird (Nectarinia zeylonica) 111. Maroonbreasted Sunbird (Nectarinia lotenia) 112. Purple Sunbird (Nectarinia asiatica) 113. White-eye (Zosterops palpebrosa) 114. House Sparrow (Passer domesticus) 115. Yellowthroated Sparrow (Petronia xanthocollis) 116. Spotted Munia (Lonchura punctulata) 117. Rosefinch (Carpodacus erythrinus)

This is admittedly a most incomplete list. It is presented here as a first attempt at initiating serious bird study in this fascinating wilderness area.

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Our Contributors

Subscriptions and Donations

The Variant Drongo Population of Khandala Region by A. Navarro S.J.

On the cover of the last publication of Dr. Salim Ali's "Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas" is a striking picture of three species of Drongos with the Cuckoo Drongo which may be mistaken for a Drongo but is not a Drongo.

The sight of this picture awakened in my mind the remembrance that five out of nine species of Indian Drongos are found in the Khandala region. From the foot of the Khandala Ghats upto Lanovla, from the Duke's Nose ravine down to the open plains and from the Dhobi Tank along the Rajmaji ravine including the adjoining ravine up to the jungle bordering the Walvan Lake. It is a small but difficult terrain to move about.

The five species found in Khandala are:-

- The Black Drongo or King Crow (Dicrurus adsimilis)
- The Grey Drongo (Dicrurus leucophaeus longicaudatus)
- The White-bellied Drongo (Dicrurus caerulescens caerulescens)
- The Bronzed Drongo (Dicrurus aeneus aeneus)
- The Large Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus grandis)

The four species absent from Khandala region are:-

- The Crowbilled Drongo (Dicrurus annectans)
- The Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus remifer tectirostris)
- The Haircrested Drongo (Dicrurus hottentottus hottentottus)
- The Small Andaman Drongo (Dicrurus andamanensis andamanensis)

I will give a short description of the geographical distribution of the four species absent from the Khandala region.

The Crowbilled and Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo are confined to the North Eastern side of the Himalayas, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, N.E.F.A., Assam and Nagaland. The Haircrested Drongo is the most widely distributed species, from the Himalayan range to the North of Uttar Pradesh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, N.E.F.A., Assam, Nagaland, and E. Pakistan along the eastern side avoiding part of Tamil Nadu to the Western side from Kerala. Tamil Nadu, West Mysore entering Maharashtra State in an irregular struggle. The small Andaman Drongo is confined to the Andaman Islands.

Drongos have several features in common. Their colouration is from dark grey, black, bronze black, and glossy black, they all have slender bodies with forked tails some of their outer rectrices have upcurved ends. The outer tail feathers of the Large Racket-tail Drongos have a bare shaft ending in a racket or spatula shape. Some have a decorative crest

and in one species the crest is formed of feathers like hairs.

Drongos are to be found in forest areas with the exception of the Black Drongo or King Crow that has a preference for open country and frequently can be seen perching on the telegraph wires along the railway tracks. In Khandala they are occasionally seen on the Poona road, open side roads, and gardens. Throughout the year they have a loud harsh call though during their breeding season, they have a morning and evening song like a chattering musical duet. Late in the evening at their roosting grounds, a few of them can be as noisy as the Common Mynas.

The Grey Drongo being a migrant comes to Khandala in October avoiding dense forest. Nevertheless it can be seen at the entrance of forest tracks and their presence is indicated by their constant monotonous harsh calls.

I have observed the White Bellied Drongo in the forest area and at the entrance of the ravines where occasionally, I have found its nest. It has the reputation of being a brave bird with an aggressive instinct when other birds approach its nest or interfere with its breeding activities.

Once I witnessed the way a pair of White Bellied Drongos defended their nest from the attacks of a pair of Jungle Crows. The Little Drongo fought with such determination that after a long struggle the Jungle Crows flew off. The calls and songs of these Drongos are more like the calls of the Black Drongo but more musical and melodious in their duets at the time of their breeding season.

The Bronzed Drongo: I have often found this Little Drongo in the depths of the ravines always within the vicinity of streams or nallas in well shaded spots with dense undergrowth often associated with mixed parties of Flycatchers, Bulbuls, Wabblers and Babblers. I consider this Drongo to be less noisy than the previous species. In the breeding season, it has a fine repertory of clear metallic notes with soft musical whistling melodies.

The Large Racket-tailed Drongo: I have found this Drongo in the most secluded patches of forest in the ravines, with a preference for tall trees with creepers and an abundance of undergrowth. Year after year I have seen Large Racket-tailed Drongos in the same patch of forest. Being insectivorous in their diet, they capture the insects on the wing, twisting and turning with the grace and skill and speed of a flycatcher.

Usually they are associated with Tree Pies, Shamas, Whistling Thrushes, Hornbills, Woodpeckers including the Indian Giant Squirrel and Black-faced monkey.

Such association I consider to be purely environmental as there is no fundamental relationship amongst such heterogenous groups.

The Drongos being a noisy group with a large variety of calls and songs, are endowed with the instinct of mimicking others bird songs as well as the noises of creatures associated with their environment. In this respect some are better than others though the Large Racket-tailed Drongo can be considered as the most versatile mimic of the Drongo group. I have heard it mimicking the Tree-Pie, the Serpent Eagle, the Fantail Flycatcher, the Scimitar Babbler, the Grey Hornbill, the Shama and the Giant Squirrel.

Note: In the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by Dr. Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley the Indian Drongos have been included within a single family: one genus, nine species, and six sub-species.

A curious habit of the Common Myna by Sri B Sreekumar

In our compound at Kottayam (Kerala State) I have installed some wooden nest boxes (15 x 15 x 30 cm). These are tied to tree trunks with thick copper wire. The wire encircles the boxes and the entrance hole is about 2" above the wire.

In January 1975, soon after I had put up one of these boxes, a pair of Common Mynas (Acridotheres tristis) adopted it and began stuffing leaves and fibres into the box. Sometime during this the birds thrust a crow-feather horizontally between the tin roof and the front panel.

A pair of Common Mynas which occupied a box in December 1976 also fixed a crow-feather to the nest-box, inserting it between the front panel and the one on the left side. This was at a point 20 cm. above the base, and the feather stood at an angle of 45° to the horizontal.

In January 1977 again, another nest box had a similar decoration. This time the feather was found thrust between the front panel and the copper wire. It was noted that a pair of Jungle Mynas (Acridotheres fuscus) had not placed a feather or anything else on the outside of their nest-box.

In April 1978 a pair of Common Mynas started a nest in the hollow trunk of a papaya stump. Just below the top of the stump there was a thin branch. Between this and the trunk the mynas had thrust a crow-feather. One evening this feather was blown off by the wind. At noon the next day the mynas brought another crow-feather and fixed it exactly where the first one had been. The feather dislodged by the wind was lying even then at the foot of the stump. A few days later the nest became water-logged due to rain and was abandoned by the mynas.

(Prof. K K Neelakantan who forwarded this note writes: The habit of decorating the nest with one or more strips of cloth is well-known in the Pariah Kite. Birds like the Ringed Plover which lay eggs in shallow, unlined scrapes on sandy or gravelly ground are known occasionally to make use of 'landmarks' such as a tussock of grass, a stone, a mass of dry cow-dung, a piece of paper and so on. However, the use of large feather as a pointer or for decorative purposes by the Common Myna does not seem to have been noted by birdwatchers. Comments on this note are invited from other readers.)

So-called Indian Edible-nest Swiftlets (*Collocalia unicolor*) by Margaret P. Walkey

On May 23, 1978, we paid a visit to the Tiger Caves just outside Ooty in the Nilgiris. These are reached by a fairly steep but short climb from the Ooty/Coonoor road.

The caves are a labyrinth of tunnels hollowed by water out of a huge rock face, over many centuries. Stooping low, we entered the first tunnel and groped our way along its uneven rocky floor, aided by torches. Beyond the entrance it was pitch dark and too low for us to stand upright. We began to hear strange clicking noises and every now and then to feel a breath of air on our faces as the birds, disturbed by our arrival, flew out of the tunnel. They brushed against our heads as they flew past. Was this in protest at our intrusion, or merely by accident in the darkness?

We explored the caves in two relays. Those outside watched the entrance of the tunnel and saw the sooty brown swiftlets in increasing numbers emerging rapidly from the tunnel to fly about above.

Inside, we shone our torches on the walls and roof of the first cave and saw many nests fixed securely to them by a thick gum of solidified saliva. The nests, shaped like half-saucers or oyster shells, appeared to be made of lichen and dried grass, closely matted together. Many contained eggs, three being the most common number. They were white,

long and narrow. Other nests had recently-hatched fledglings, while some contained both eggs and fledglings. Some others contained feathered fledglings grown almost too big for the nests.

The fledglings made cheeping, mewling noises, as with gaping beaks they demanded food. We saw only one parent bird remaining in the cave, flying anxiously around, sometimes pausing to cling to the edge of a nest or to the wall.

When we came out of the tunnel, our eyes blinked, unaccustomed to what then seemed to us bright light, although the day was cloudy.

Salim Ali in his *Hill Birds* compares the rapid wing-beats of the swiftlets to those of pipistrelle bats. This is interesting, because they have to negotiate obstacles in the dark tunnels, just as bats do, and indeed it is bats and not birds that we would have expected to find there, unless we had been previously told about the swiftlets.

Plant and animal life normally demands light, yet the young swiftlets hatch out and spend the early part of their existence in pitch darkness, while the adult birds alternate between light and darkness, apparently having no difficulty in adaptation from one to the other. This puzzles us. So does their ability to locate their individual nests and to fly very rapidly out of such dark tunnels. Do they use some form of radar? Do they take their bearings by echoes from the clicking sounds they make?

Recovery Plan Approved For Protecting Ecosystem of Hawaii's
Endangered Palila (Extracts from Endangered Species Technical
Bulletin, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240)

A final recovery plan for the Endangered palila (Psittirostra bailleui), a member of the endemic Hawaiian honeycreeper family, has been approved by the Service.

The plan's primary objective is to restore the bird to nonendangered status on State-owned lands flanking Mauna Kea, the highest mountain on the Island of Hawaii. This would be accomplished in part by eradicating all feral sheep and goats that are threatening the palila's last remaining habitat, an ecosystem of mamane (Sophora chrysophylla) and naio (Myoporum sandwicense) forests above the 6,000-foot level.

The recovery team, headed by Andrew J. Berger of the University of Hawaii, said, "If the present destruction and modification of the mamananao ecosystem being done by these animals can be stopped,

achievement of the plan's primary objective will be 90 percent complete."

At the turn of the century, the palila ranged over a large part of the island, including the slopes of adjacent Mauna Loa. The reasons for the drastic reduction in range are not fully known, the recovery team said.

Palila Population Determined

Currently, the recovery team estimates the total palila population at 1,400 individuals. These birds are found on or near the Mauna Kea Forest Reserve and the Kaohe Game Management Area, which are under State jurisdiction and located on the north-western slopes. The recovery plan recommends that two parcels of land be acquired for inclusion in these two areas to provide additional protected habitat for the bird. Both parcels would be fenced to keep out livestock from adjacent pastures.

In 1937, there were an estimated 40,000 sheep roaming Mauna Kea, about one animal for every two acres. Since 1955, sheep populations have been reduced somewhat, and vegetation has recovered at lower elevations of the Mauna Kea Forest Reserve. However, the recovery team said, "at higher elevations between 8,000 and 10,000 feet, degradation of the ecosystem continues," necessitating the eradication of all sheep and goats to protect the mamane-naio forest on which the palila is totally dependent.

Other Species To Benefit

The recovery team noted that the plan also would benefit five other Endangered endemic birds that occur on Mauna Kea. These include the Hawaiian dark-rumped petrel (Pterodroma phaeopygia sandwichensis), Hawaiian hawk (Buteo solitarius) Hawaii creeper (Losops maculata mana), Hawaii akepa (Loxops coccinea coccinea), and akiapolaau (Hemignathus wilsoni).

The akiapolaau is a permanent resident of the mamane-naio forests, occurring in low numbers. According to the recovery team, maintenance of this population may serve to preserve genetic variability and thereby help ensure the akiapolaau's survival.

As recently as 1970, the recovery team said, the dark-rumped petrel was sighted on Mauna Kea and may still nest there. The Hawaiian hawk is found primarily on the eastern slopes of Mauna Kea and has been known to breed on the northwestern slopes. The akepa and creeper are rare in the palila habitat and may occur only as birds of passage.

The recovery team estimated the cost of implementing the plan at a total of \$456,150 through fiscal year 1986. This sum would provide funds for a number of studies on the mamananao forest.

Book Review by Madhav Gadgil

J.R.T. Sharrock (1976) The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland. British Trust for Ornithology - Irish Wildbird Conservancy. pp 477 including some 200 maps and a set of 12 transparent overlays. Price Nine Pounds.

This is a truly splendid book in many ways. In it you will find compiled up to date information on food and habitat preference, requirements for nesting, and history and present status of populations of all the two-hundred odd species of birds that breed in Britain and Ireland. The distribution of breeding birds is presented in the form of maps divided into grids of 10 km x 10 km squares. The breeding status in each grid square is indicated by dots of various sizes. The ten transparent overlays depicting such factors as altitude, July temperature, annual rainfall, sessile oakwoods, chalk and limestone and lack of standing fresh water allow one to gain an insight into the factors determining the distribution patterns. Not only will this volume be a boon to British birdwatchers who have moulded and generated it, it would stand as a landmark of documentation in population biology, ecology and biogeography, and no doubt in coming years serve as a source for many interesting new developments in these fields.

But, even more remarkable than the production itself is the way in which this volume was produced. It is the fruit of labour of thousands of amateur bird-watchers distributed throughout Britain and Ireland who generated the information that has gone into this book over a period of five years. It would no doubt be every bird-lover's dream in years to come that he may be a proud member of another such army of birdwatchers in his home country, an army which would produce something equally worthwhile!

Correspondence

Biology is for Birds:

By Dr. Salim Ali

I was glad to read Professor Gadgil's piece "Biology is for the Birds"

in your issue for May 1978, and his apt pointers for further field studies in India. After naming a number of species as 'major consumers' of flower nectar (p.5) he says 'Even the Black Drongo appeared to sip the nectar on occasion, though it mostly concentrated on the pursuit of flying insects'. Firstly, I would like to suggest that the drongos he saw thus in Bandipur, at least the majority, were actually Ashy Drongos (Dicrurus leucophaeus) and not Black. The Ashy Drongo is common in the cold weather - the flowering season of the Silkcotton (Bombax) - in Karnataka and Kerala, and the Bandipur habitat would seem to be more appropriate for it than for the Black. Moreover, the absence of this species from the checklist in the Appendix tends to support my suspicion of mistaken identity. This is not to say that the Black Drongo may not also have been there, but ecologically the Ashy seems more likely. Then again, I am somewhat puzzled to find the "Black" drongo excluded from the list of 'major consumers' of the nectar of silkcotton blossoms. My personal experience everywhere has been that the Ashy Drongo is perhaps the most unfailing habitue, or addict, of Silkcotton and Coral (Erythrina) flowers. I have often remarked on the bullying and dog-in-the-manger tactics the bird employs, attacking and supplanting other nectar-seeking visitors from distant parts of the tree and appropriating the flower for itself. In my experience it is primarily nectar that the bird is after, and any insects it may take are by way of a bonus! I have frequently shot these drongos in the act of feeding from the flowers and found not only considerable quantities of pollen adhering to their forehead and throat feathers, but nectar dripping freely from their legs, upside down.

By Prof. KK Neelakantan

Congratulations on publishing so deep a study as the Ornithology of Bandipur by Dr. Madhav Gadgil. We could do with more of this sort of thing.

However, I am surprised to find in the check list appended 2 species whose distribution as given in the Handbook does not cover Karnataka (or even Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh I think). These are the Blacknaped Green Woodpecker (Picus canus) & the Whitecheeked Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys). Please see the distribution maps given for the 2 species in Vol IV & Vol VI of the Handbook.

When the list has been passed by so eminent a scientist as Dr. Madhav Gadgil, a humble amateur like me has no business to question it. But, could there have been some error? Were specimens ever obtained? Or

did more than 2 experienced observers agree about the field identification?

When I saw the Whitecheeked Bulbul included in the bird list given in the Tiger Report, I told myself that someone must have seen a juvenile Redwhiskered Bulbul, not bothered about the colour of the vent, and named it Whitecheeked. But when more than 12 names seem to support the validity of the list in the May Newsletter, one wonders whether the mistake is not the Handbook's.

Please discuss this with Dr. Gadgil. If the 2 species do occur in Bandipur, a few specimens may be obtained & Salim Ali informed of this. If, however, these are errors, you should print a correction in a future issue of the Newsletter.

Madhav Gadgil replies

I am most flattered that two of our most eminent ornithologists have gone so carefully over my article, and am grateful to them for their comments. I must admit that I am not at all as competent as I would have wished in bird systematics and may certainly be in error in the three cases they point out.

1) Bandipur, at least around the campus, does have Black Drongo and not Ashy Drongo. This was confirmed by Dr. Robert Grubb during his visit. However, there may be Ashy Drongo also, particularly away from the lodges. I will investigate this and report in a future issue of the Newsletter. That the drongo did not do much sipping of nectar is definitely correct. Again, next year I will try to collect precise quantitative data on this point and report.

2) The mention of whitecheeked bulbul is pure blunder. What we have is whitebrowed bulbul. I am sorry for the mistake which crept in while preparing the checklist.

3) The identification of the blacknaped green woodpecker may also be a mistake, but I would try to confirm this by looking more closely. If I find I am correct, I will certainly act on Professor Neelakantan's suggestion and collect a few specimens.

Again, I am most thankful to Dr. Salim Ali and Professor K.K. Neelakantan for their comments.

Painted Storks and White Ibises by ZF

During my morning ride on the 17th June I was delighted to find a congregation of Painted Storks and White Ibises in Dodda Gubbi Lake. I went to the lake again later with my binoculars to find that there were 17 Painted Storks including 3 young with dark faces instead of yellow, and no red on their feathers. There were 9 White Ibises all very similar in size and colouration, but one noticeably larger than the others. There were 12 Little Egrets with their "dainty filamentous ornamental feathers on both back and breast". I watched this congregation for over an hour and noticed that while the Painted Storks and Ibises followed the rule about birds of a feather flocking together, the Little Egrets positioned themselves in between the White Ibises obviously to procure food disturbed by the wading Ibises.

These birds remained on the lake only for a few days and I did not see them on the morning of the 22nd though I did see one White Ibis flying westwards over head.

No Crows in Shahabad by M.B. Krishna

During my recent short visit to Shahabad's A.V.B. colony, (about 8 Km from Wadi near gulbarga) I was surprised to find that the House Crow (Corvus splendens) was quite a rare bird (almost absent, I should say!) within the colony. However outside the colony the House Crow population seemed to be quite alright, with these birds constituting c. 9% of the local population as obtained by the transect method. The Shahabad colony has a human population of about 3,000 so I see no reason why the crows should not be able to eke out a living by scavenging the area. However I would be very glad if any of the readers could throw some light upon this Phenomenon.

Extracts from a letter from L.A. Hill

Coming to a new country, nay, to a new continent, is fascinating from the bird point of view of course. Every bird you see is a "first"! I was away in Chile, Bolivia and Colombia as soon as I first arrived, last November, but when I got back I bought a field guide to the Birds of North America, and I still recall my excitement when I went out on New Year's Day to an old Spanish Church 10 miles outside Tucson, called the Mission of St. Xavier de Bac and walked around the fields and hedges in its vicinity, and started looking up the birds I saw, all, as a stranger, being "firsts". One nearly always remembers the places where one chalked up first sightings and

that was a field day for me:- Cardinal, Pyrruloxia and Green-tailed Towhee * (what odd names some of these New World birds have?) Black Phoebe, Road-runner, Gambels Quail (with very odd top-knot on its forehead, ridiculous birds but very handsome, Meadow lark, Whitecrowned sparrow, Curvebilled thrasher and quite a few more. I have joined the Tucson Audubon Society and occasionally go out on their field trips when they occur over week-ends (There are so many retired people here, they come from all over the U.S.A, that many field trips are held on week days). I don't like going with a party of people, but when you're new it pays, to start with anyway, as they go to good birding spots and have a leader who knows the birds. Tucson is at an elevation of around 2,000' but the mountains round about go up to 9000' so you get many varieties of birds in the area. Many of the valleys, or canyons as they call them here are really very beautiful, with pine and oak and cottonwood and sycamores, and the bird life is wonderful to behold, from Coppery-tailed Trogons (Which I haven't yet seen) to many varieties of Humming Birds, both species being migratory, arriving here in the spring, around April and May. These field trips usually start around 6.30 a.m. and return around 5 to 6 p.m. I went to some

saline lakes near a place called Wilcox near here recently (they get huge flocks of Sand Hill Cranes there in the winter, but I missed those) and I felt that my day was made when I saw about 50 American avocet there, in breeding plumage. They really are exceptionally splendid birds, and very large too, and I would have been quite content if hadn't seen anything else. However, there were many other good things as well, such as Black-necked Stilt and Wilson's Phalaropes, the latter just getting into breeding plumage. They are lovely birds, with their needle-shaped bills, and their endearing habit of spinning around in the water. A fortnight ago, the Phoenix Audubon Society had a 2-day field trip to a place in Mexico (about 160 miles from here) called Puerto Periasco, on the shores of the Gulf of California and I went along. I was keen to take some one along with me, although I speak Spanish well, and knew I could hold my own in Mexico. I wanted someone to guide me through the Papago Indian Reservation on the side of the border. In the event, I went on my own and had no trouble with marauding braves out on the warpath. On the beaches there I saw quite a few old friends, such as Dunlin (most in full summer plumage), Sanderling, Kentish Plover (here they call them Snowy Plover), Osprey etc. Also many birds new to me, of course. The marbled godwit were great to see, and there were surf birds, and Willets and Brown Pelicans and long-billed curlew and Red-breasted Mergansers and much else beside.

I find it very useful having a hobby such as bird-watching as it doesn't take long in a new place to find friends with a similar interest. I went out with one such friend to the local sewage ponds here in Tucson last Sunday at 6 a.m. He has been counting the birds on one of the ponds

* Members of the New World Seed-eaters
Editor

there every Sunday morning for a year. And a friend of his (one Gale Monson, who was a co-author of "The Birds of Arizona") does it on Wednesday mornings! As my friend said, there is nearly always something exciting to see - it's not often that you don't find something unusual. Last Sunday it was a white pelican on the pond and several flights of white faced ibis (very similar to glossy ibis) winging their way northward, overhead. They get very large numbers of ducks on this pond in the winter: Shovellers Ruddy ducks (stiff tails) etc. For these large ponds and lakes and also on the sea shore and marshes, one really needs a telescope of course and I shall soon have to get myself one.

Early in January I found a ringer, or "bander" here in N. America, who was banding birds every Thursday morning out on a guest ranch about 15 miles out of town. He is a retired bander, who lives in Minnesota on the Canadian border; it's so cold there in winter that he spends October-March here in Tucson and has been doing this for 7 years now. He has a band of local helpers, one helps him band, one weighs, one takes the notes, and about 6 go round collecting the birds from the nests. It is all highly civilized, and in return for allowing guests at the ranch to watch the ringing, and take photos of birds in the hand etc. the ranch sends out coffee, and toast and hot sausages for the crew!!! I really felt that I had been definitely accepted, when I had my own coffee mug here with my name on it! They caught about 90 birds per session, which was around 2,200 over the six months about 1/3 of which were white-crowned sparrows, which winter here and breed up in Alaska. Funnily enough of the 18,000 birds or so that this man has ringed, he's had only 1 "control" and no recoveries". He has of course, re-trapped many of his own birds.

The ringing administration is very different here from the U.K. There ringers pay for their own rings, and can ring-within reason-where and when and what they want, including foreign countries such as Portugal, Spain, Mauretania etc. so long as they get permission from the local authorities. Here it is all very much controlled by the bureaucracy (The Fish and Wildlife Service). Once you have your permit, they provide the ring free, but you are very much limited to where you can ring. My friend for instance is only permitted to do so in Minnesota and Arizona. And it is very difficult to get permission to ring outside the States and Canada - and if you do get it you are only allowed to ring North American migrant species.

When my son was here, he gave me a stamp album for my birthday, and I have now become a thematic collector - theme, birds! I first started thinking about it last year, when I saw the collection of a friend in England. Now I have been well and truly bitten and get

a great deal of enjoyment from it. I have a different page for each family and go to some length to title each page with order (top left) Family (top right) and English name (bottom right) eg. Falconi formes: accipitidrae: Hawks, Eagles and Old World Vultures etc. I find this most useful in helping me to learn the latin names: I do the writing with transfers - you buy the sheets and press the letters on - and it looks most professional! At least it does once you've got the hang of it. To start with I was pretty poor L^oons!! One of my problems of course, is getting hold of stamps! I am not at this stage looking for anything rare or expensive, just plain numbers. If you or your readers of the Newsletter have bird stamps to spare, I would be glad to buy them or swap or trade, or whatever the technical name is. I have bought a useful book "A check list of the birds of the world" by James Clements which gives latin and English names which I find indispensable.

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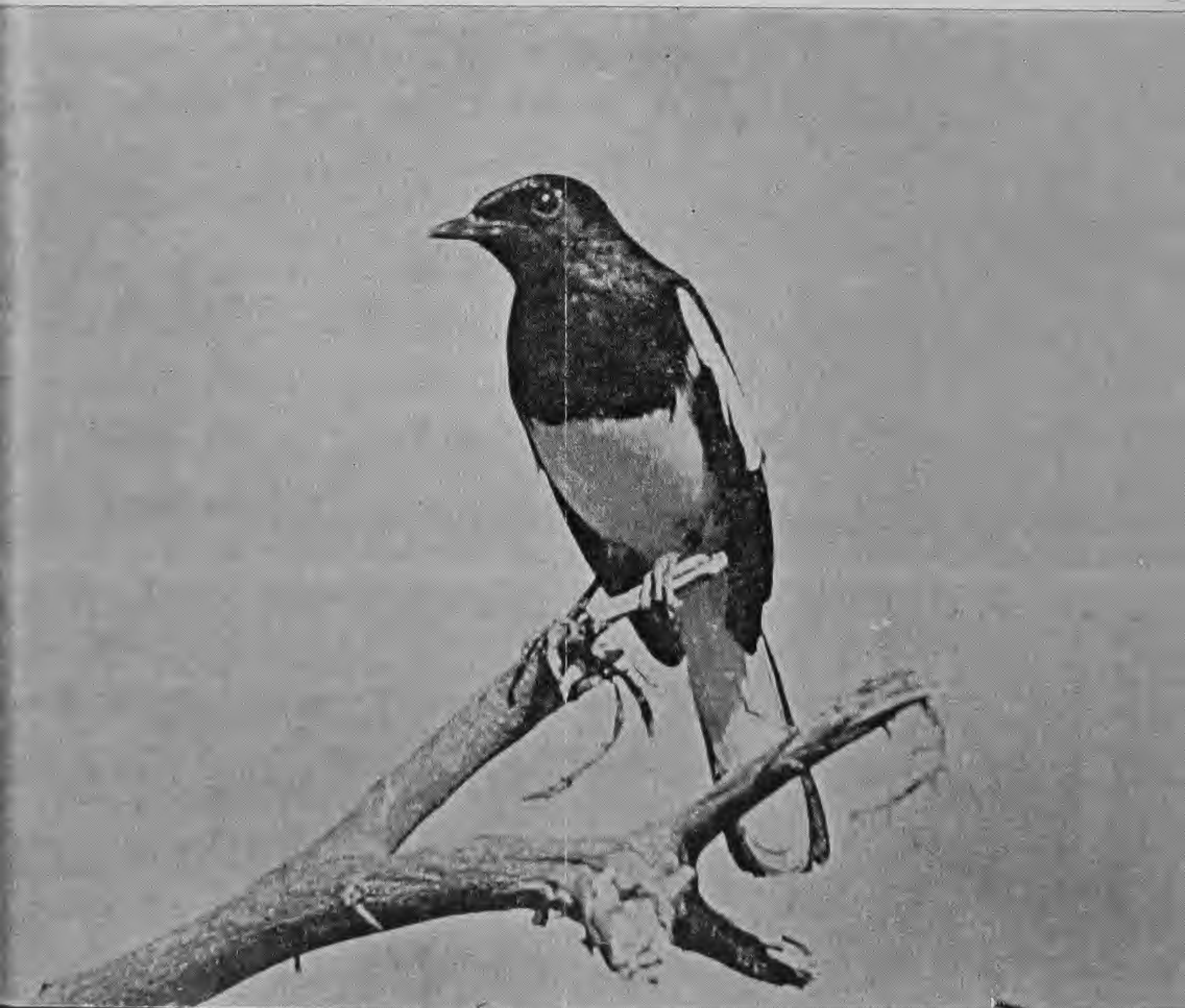
The short note titled "Roseringed Parakeet Feeds on the Fruits of *Peltophorum ferrugineum*" written by Ananda Rao and Mr. M. Hamid Ali was wrongly mentioned as being written by Dr. N. Shivanarayan (Newsletter June 1978)

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
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Subscriptions and Donations

Breeding of the Mallard (*Anser platyrhynchos*) in Nepal by
Lt. Col. James O.M. Roberts.

The Handbook Vol. I p. 162 states that a large proportion of the Mallard visiting the subcontinent in the winter come from Siberia. This duck also (now) breeds in "very small numbers" on the Kashmir lakes. In the Birds of Nepal (1976) the Flemings write (p.38) "Thought to nest on Titi Lake (South of the Nilgiri peaks of Annapurna)".

In May/June 1977 I was able to confirm this conjecture with actual sight records.

The Titi lake is situated in north central Nepal (28° 38' north, 83° 37' east) at a height of 2,622 meters (8,600 feet) in a bend on the east side of the Kaligandaki, about 2 1/2 km. from that river. At its nearest point the Chinese Tibetan border is 45 km. away. The situation is spectacular with the main peak of Dhaulagiri (8,169 m.) towering above the lake to the north west. The lake is quite small, very roughly 300 meters long by 200 broad, mostly thickly covered with grass and water plants: less than half consists of clear water, indeed just a "duck pond".

I first visited Titi from 30 April to 2 May 1977. At this time of the year the main spring migration from the subcontinent to the north has passed over the Himalayas, although some stragglers may remain until the end of May. There were five Mallard on the lake, one pair and three apparently unattached males. It was not unreasonable to speculate that three females might be sitting in the thick cover, but we caught no sight of them over the three days. The local people assured us that numerous Mallard did indeed nest and breed there. (Also that they did not molest the birds: apparently, and fortunately for the Mallard, the shooting of one some years ago had been followed within hours by a hail storm which caused considerable devastation!)

Roughly 6 weeks later, from 11 to 13 June, I sent one of my Nepalese boys to look at the lake again. This young man had been with me in May, and on other expeditions into the mountains. He has worked on our farm in Pokhara, where we breed Mallard. I consider his testimony completely reliable. On this visit he counted eleven females and seven males. As far as he could estimate, there were twenty five ducklings about 2 weeks old, the property of three or four mothers. Each evening the drakes flighted to the nearby Kaligandaki river, returning in the very early morning. All the females were visible most of the day, indicating that nesting was over, but not precluding the possibility of some additional females sitting unseen in the thick cover.

It is fascinating to speculate, with other known breeding places 1000 km to the north west and 2-3,000 km to north, how this population of breeding Mallard became, apparently, fully established on such a small lake. Admittedly Titi does lie immediately on a known (but probably not major) migration route along the line of the Kaligandaki river. Considering that the lake lies just two hours off a main trade route, it is not impossible that an examination of other small lakes in remoter areas might yield interesting results. Rara at 2,987 m in N.W. Nepal the largest lake in Nepal, is an obvious candidate for investigation at the correct time of year, but it lacks cover for nesting. This might be established and it would be an interesting experiment, in this National Park, to discover if duck could be induced to breed there by the introduction of natural food and cover plants.

It would also be interesting to learn the true extent of the "very small numbers" breeding in Kashmir, why the numbers have declined, and whether anything can be done to increase them.

In addition to the Mallard, we can record in 1977 the first (apparently) properly authenticated sight record of the Ruddy Shelduck (Tadorna ferruginea) breeding in Nepal indeed in the subcontinent outside Ladakh. The Handbook mentions the Everest region as a strong possibility, and the Flemings, the Manangbhot Valley.

Almost certainly the "Brahminy" breeds in both these localities, but our sight record is by Mr. H.S. Nepali (Kaji) of Kathmandu who saw ducklings near the source of the Kaligandaki, about 6 km from the Tibetan border, in June 1977.

Apart from the strictly resident species, the only other normally migratory duck known to nest south of Ladakh and Tibet seen to be the Marbled Teal (in Pakistan) and White-eyed Pochard (in Kashmir). The discovery of the Mallard nesting far to the south of its former limits prompts the question whether a good food supply and congenial surroundings may be more important than the longer hours of day light. However the Mallard is probably the most adaptable of all ducks.

Birdwatching at Madras in January by V. Santharam

Birdwatching in January is a pleasant experience, especially early in the morning, when the new-born day is being welcomed by the crows and sparrows. The stars are fading in the sky as the Sun rises and the sunlight filters through the curtain of fog. A breeze blows adding to the existing cold.

A flash of blue appears after a loud and long cackle as the white breasted kingfisher flies to a television aerial and continues the cackle from the perch. Another kingfisher answers it and there goes on an interesting duet till it flies away.

The pied wagtail in its trim black-and-white plumage flies to another aerial, whistling all the way. It sings its sweet song to its mate, while its tail jerks up and down. There is a break in the song as a rival magpie robin enters the "territory" and the 'owner' of it chases the "intruder" by "pouncing" on it and flying behind it, as it leaves the place. After a while, the song is resumed by the "owner" of the "territory".

Meanwhile plenty of activities go on in the huge and magnificent bougainvillaea bush on the other side of the street. A lot of 'towit-tuit' is heard from somewhere deep in the bush and gradually a small bird with olive brown upper parts and whitish underparts appears. The tailor bird's loud and cheerful song is unmistakable. I have noticed on many occasions that once a tailor bird begins to sing it is immediately accompanied by another. Today is no exception and another tailorbird is seen nearby. They flit to another branch and continue their song. The blyth's reed warbler, a winter visitor to the Madras City, and a solitary bird utters its call "churr" from somewhere deep in the bush. Rarely can one have a glimpse of this skulky bird though its calls are heard commonly.

Purple rumped sunbirds alight on the telegraph wire and survey the surroundings. Their bright colours glow in the sunlight as they fly to the plantain tree for a bath. They bathe in the fresh dew collected by the leaves by rubbing their bellies and breasts on them, again and again. The purple sunbirds also appear and they alight on the branch of a bougainvillaea, close to a cluster of its colourful flowers. Then they drink nectar from the flowers. They hang in the air opposite to the clump beating the wings fast while drinking. They fly to another cluster whistling.

A couple of redvented bulbuls utter their joyous calls from a post, preening their feathers. The white tip of the tail is conspicuous during flight, against their smoke-brown plumage with black markings and black markings and a black crest on the head. A white browed bulbul is heard from the bougainvillaea bush, its song being a series of notes, sung in quick successions. Though the song is frequently heard it is very difficult to have a look at this bird which is very shy and skulky.

On the parapet wall of the terrace of the opposite house two spotted doves settle and start preening their feathers. They start 'coo'ing but they take to their wings as the jealous crows do not tolerate their presence and they settle somewhere else. A sisterhood of white-headed babblers settle on the grass and bush covered ground, next door, free from human habitations. They hunt for insects underneath the dry leaves and explore some plants too, always uttering their musical whistling that is long and continuous while their tails flick up and down.

A familiar 'tuck, cuk' is heard from the topmost branch of a tree and the coppersmith, producer of this call turns its head this side and that side as it calls. From a tree, a bit far off a golden oriole calls out its musical whistle resembling 'pi-loo' or something similar to it. A series of whistling notes of the Ioras are also heard.

The sky is also full of birds. The swallows and swifts fly and circle about, feasting on the flying insects. They catch the early morning Sun's rays on their white underneath, making it seem yellowish. Noisy flocks of rose-ringed parakeets, calling to each other, fly about in the air. Mynahs too fly, screaming in twos or threes to their feeding grounds, the white patches underneath their wings flashing.

Without any hurry and with leisurely wing beats soars a pariah kite in the sky. It pays no attention to the crows that chase it. A shikra rises in the air with quick beats of the wings, its grey body and long tail and pointed wings making its identification easier. It circles and hovers above a particular spot for sometime and disappears behind some trees.

A hoopoe appears and occupies the aerial previously occupied by the kingfisher and lets its crest open and close. It preens its back with its long and curved bill for a while and flies off to join its mate perched on the overhead tank of the opposite house.

You can also see little ring plovers, little stints, spotted sandpipers, white, grey, and large pied wagtails, indian pipits, blue jays, short-toed larks(?), small blue kingfishers, bee-eaters, yellow wattled and red wattled lapwings, drongos, egrets, pond herons, night herons, black-winged stilts, pale harrier(?), ash-crowned finch larks, blue rock pigeons and sky larks and many more on the banks of Adayar river and on the backwaters. Whiskered terns can be seen flying over the river and black headed gulls over the sea. Koels also can be heard occasionally. At dusk you

can hear the spotted owlets from the mango tree, next door. And on moonlit nights you may hear the yellow wattled lapwing in flight above my house.

Birds at the Khandala Pond between the 20th and 22nd of January 78
by A. Navarro S.J.

From the 20th to the 22nd of January 78', Mr. I. Hernandez and I decided to spend most of our time birdwatching at Khandala. The first day, at 7 a.m. we went along the Pune Road. Near the junction of the upgoing traffic and the down direction traffic is a pond which during the monsoon fills six to seven times its normal size. Passing by the side of the pond, we heard the trilling calls of the Indian Little Grebes.

We looked at the pond and saw the Indian Little Grebe's swimming in all directions, therefore we decided to have a long look and a closer view of their activities.

We commented on how during the last seven years these Indian Little Grebe's by and by have been vanishing from ponds and reservoirs. If we cannot succeed in protecting them, we may run the risk of losing one more bird from our regional fauna.

We sat by the side of the pond. Our first thought was, if only we could count the number, of the Indian Little Grebes in the pond. Soon we realized that it was not an easy task, since they are bottom-feeders, and submerge in, and emerge out of the water at such a speed, that we could not cope with their movements. Any how later on as they slowed down their feeding activities, and started swimming two by two it became possible to distinguish their sexes. We thought this to be the right moment to evaluate the strength of the Indian Little Grebe population of Khandala pond. In all we located six pairs at different sides of the pond.

Meanwhile we could hear the shrill calls of other grebes at a far distance, some at the edge of the water-line, and others calling through the grass near the water. In all we surmised there must have been twelve pairs of Indian Little Grebes.

As they emerge to the surface, tiny circular waves or ripples are formed growing broader and broader until the ripples reach the sides of the pond. When they speed in a straight direction an inverted 'V' shape of ripples is formed behind them with each stroke of their

webbed feet with a slight side ways movement, until the last ripple vanishes at the same time as fresh ones are being formed. This may produce an optical illusion and may look as if the Indian Little Grebe is pulling the inverted 'V' shape, though it is due to the way in which the ripples are formed and get out of sight.

Occasionally they were feeding though by submerging more than half of their bodies into the water, heads in and tails out, they looked like little floating toys at the surface of the water.

When chasing each other they uttered trilling calls mixed with tak-tak noises. At other times they were chasing one another with open wings actually running on the surface of the water. By noon they slowed down their activities. Some were motionless, floating, and others were hidden among the grass and Lotus plants. Nevertheless there were always a few pairs swimming at the centre of the pond.

At the end of the day, by the side of the pond watching the Indian Little Grebes we had been unaware of the varieties of birds that came early in the morning and departed late in the evening, having spent the whole day in the pond by the side of the Indian Little Grebes. Some observations of these other birds now follow,

The day Visitors. The white breasted kingfisher spent most of the time perching on a branch of a banyan tree by the side of the pond having its daily ration of fish from the pond. Suddenly we saw the common kingfisher hovering and diving into the water and having caught a small fish flew back to its perch. The common swallows made their appearance after 9 a.m. flying over the pond hawking for insects. Around 4.30 p.m. they left the pond. The jungle mynas were seen through out the day shifting from one place to another, always in groups, with their usual chattering conversation. The cattle egrets were most of the time at the edge of the pond near the open ground. The pond herons were seen in the shallow part of the pond. A few red-wattled lapwings were scattered here and there near the edge of the water well hidden amongst the dry grass.

These birds made their appearance at sunrise and they were quiet and moved about calmly collecting insects and occasionally changing their positions. At sunset they departed from the pond.

A couple of large wagtails were moving about at times near the water at other times on a stone wall by the side of the pond. The common sandpiper made itself visible after long intervals near the water edge.

At the end of the pond by the side of the safety line from Khandala

station where there is a long line of jungli mango trees, with a variety of bushes bordering the pond, we heard the persistent calls of the jungle crows, the crow pheasant, the koel and the Indian Grey Drongo which is a winter visitor. They were calling from the time the sun rose, up to 8 a.m. and late in the evening just at the time when the cattle egrets, pond herons and redwattled lapwings were leaving the pond.

The second day afternoon, we left the pond for a couple of hours. We made our way behind Khandala Hotel towards the Dukes Nose ravine. We stopped half way to listen and watch. Deep silence prevailed for a time, and then we saw many birds though all of them seemed to be in a silent mood except for a few calls of the little sunbird, the iora, the blue naped flycatcher and the fantail flycatcher. On a small open patch of ground we saw the forest wagtail Motacilla indicus a rare bird of the Indian Fauna. It is not the first time I have seen this wagtail at Khandala. My companions thought it to be a Pipit. Certainly it can be mistaken for a pipit.

The third day of our birdwatching around the pond after checking our notes we left the pond for awhile, on our way to the ghats, we stopped a few kilometers after the reversing station where we noticed the Malabar Grey Hornbills to be very noisy. We sat by the side of the road at the entrance of a fine patch of forest, where we located a Malabar Grey hornbill in the top branches of a tall tree by the side of the road most unconcerned by the hooting of the horns and the noisy reverberation of the heavy trucks and traffic going up and down the ghats. This Hornbill was dueting with another hornbill not far off, on the other side of the road. In a short time we saw a good number of birds typical of the Khandala ghats. In a small area we counted five hornbills simultaneously calling their variety of calls which could be classified as raucous shrills with cackling calls often ending in a laughing fit, and repeated two or three times in succession. Now and then they made a peculiar noise by a simple movement of the upper part of the bill, against the lower, producing a monotonous soft call sounding like tack-tack a woody sound, audible at a short distance, these sounds may be classified as non guttural sounds.

Ornithological Miscellany by Kumar D. Ghorpade

A new Owlet from the Peruvian Andes

The recent discovery of a new genus and species of owl on the Andes mountains of South America should be "big news" to all birdwatchers. With roughly 8,600 bird species so far known and described from the world and the general opinion of bird systematists that over 98% of the existing bird fauna of our planet has already been documented, this new finding lends support to the view that some areas of the earth are still little explored. The new owlet was found by John O'Neill and Gary Graves of the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science (U.S.A.), in cloud forest high on the eastern slopes of the Andes in northern Peru. The report in the NEW SCIENTIST of 3 November 1977 (p.284) contains a photograph of the owlet and the following additional information --- "The tiny owl is a member of the family Strigidae but has been given a genus and species of its own because of its unique features. Its facial feathers are long and delicate filaments that extend in a fringe beyond the edge of its head. It also has long bristles at the base of the bill; and these grow up between the eyes to form a fan-like crest. These two features earned the owl its common name, Long-whiskered Owlet. The owl has also been given a scientific name, Xenoglaux loweryi. The generic name, Xenoglaux, refers to the fact that, because of its whiskers and staring amber eyes, the new owlet is a stranger among owls. And the species, loweryi, commemorates George H. Lowery, Jr., Director of the Museum."

If my memory serves me correctly, the last new species of bird came from an island east of New Guinea some 6-8 years previously. Regarding new subspecies readers of the NEWSLETTER who are familiar with the Bombay Natural History Society Journal would have read of the description of a new race of the Bay Owl, Phodilus badius (Horsfield), from the Nellampathy Hills in north Kerala by S.A. Hussain and M.A. Reza Khan, who have named the new subspecies (based on a single female specimen) after Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Bird Notes on an Expedition to the Pindari Glacier

I was extremely gratified to read that Mr. F.C. Badhwar (News1. Birdwatchers, 1976, 16(2) : 10) enjoyed reading (as much as I did undertaking that trek) about my birding on the Pindari expedition (NEWSLETTER, 1976, 16(1) : 2-9). I would like him to know how much I would have liked to have accompanied him in his 1912 trip, had I been born 50 years before I did!

Regarding Mr. S.R. Shah's remark (News1. Birdwatchers, 1976, 16(3): 15) on my "keenness of eye-sight" and the apparent ease with which I appeared to have noticed so many species that he has yet to see after more than 12 Himalayan treks, may I call his attention to a statement I made in that article on Pindari birds? I wrote--- "I must make it clear here that even though the Himalaya supports a large variety of bird life, these are, for the most part, out of sight, and, unless one keeps his eyes and ears really wide open, he is bound to be disappointed with the avifauna here."

To get really good results in locating and watching birds, especially in forested situations, one must tune his/her eyes and ears to the slightest possibility of the presence of a bird. Eyes must be trained to look for movement, even if it is just the swaying of a leaf, and ears to receive any sound that could have been made by a bird, for example, rustling of dry leaves. After a long experience of watching and hearing birds in different field situations, one learns to sense their presence first (knowledge of typical bird haunts is invaluable here), and then try to locate them based on clues dropped by them. For those who habitually use binoculars to trace birds, I may suggest that, except when looking for birds in the far distance (farther than the eye can see well), one's eyes should be first used to locate the bird and then the field-glasses trained on the spot. Many beginners have the habit of relying mainly or only on their binoculars to track birds and consequently forget all about their unassisted eyes!

Bird Names and Latin Grammar

I am indebted to Mr. Thomas Gay (News1. Birdwatchers, 1974, 14(7): 10) for pointing out my blunder on the gender of the genus name Monticola, which is masculine, not feminine as I had wrongly interpreted. However, using this principle, what would Mr. Gay say on the formation of the scientific name of the Greenbacked Tit, written as Parus monticolus in the HANDBOOK (9:174)? Shouldn't the species name be monticola? If the name Parus monticola is the correct form, will Drs. Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley kindly take note?

Home work for the birdwatchers by ZF

For birdwatching to be rewarding one must do a bit of home work after returning from every outing. When you have classified the birds that have been observed some interesting facts come to light. You might

find that there are a large number of species of a particular genera or family, or you might find that the categories are so spread out that there is only one example from most of the families and genera. This has obviously something to do with the abundance or scarcity of ecological niches in that particular environment.

On the evening of 26th June I went for a short stroll and the result was as follows:

<u>Family</u>	<u>Genera</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
Dicruridae	Dicrurus	Adsimilis	
Columbidae	Streptopelia	Chinensis	
Meropidae	Merops	Orientalis	
Charadriidae	Vanellus	Indicus	
Sturnidae	Acridotheris	Tristis	
Corvidae	Corvus	Splendens	
Muscicapidae	Saxicola	Caprata	
Motacillidae	Motacilla	Maderaspatensis	
Alcedinidae	Halcyon	Smyrnensis	
Psittacidae	Psittacula	Krameri	
Ardeidae	Ardeola	Grayii	
Ardeidae	Egretta	Garzeta	
Accipitridae	Haliastur	Indus	
Pycnonotidae	Pycnonotus	Cafer	
Accipitridae	Milvus	Migrans	
Accipitridae	Elanus	Caeruleus	

It will be noticed that only two Families namely Accipitridae and Ardeidae had more than one species each, while all the Generas are different.

Incidentally while putting this list together I noticed from the Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan that in some cases there is a typical or nominate race of the species, while in others this does not exist. I enquired from Salim Ali about this and he replied as follows:

"The reason why, in the Synopsis, the nominate race is mentioned in some cases and not in others is because when a bird was first described as a species - before the subspecies concept came into vogue - it was from a country outside the Indian subcontinent. Take for example the case of your Phylloscopus inornatus. This was first recognized as a new species in 1842 by Blyth from near Calcutta as 'Regulus' (= Phylloscopus) inornatus. Later it was found that specimens of the same species collected in NW India

differed sufficiently in size, coloration etc from the Calcutta birds to be recognised as a separate population and were therefore given a subspecific name - Phylloscopus inornatus Humei. Actually both of them are winter visitors to India but originate from different parts of the Palaearctic Region.

In cases where the species was first described from outside the Indian subcontinent, say Malaya, the nominate subspecies would belong there. If we found the same bird occurring in India it would probably show a perceptible difference in coloration, size, etc. and thus be regarded as a different population and be named as a distinct subspecies. In this case the Malayan would be the nominate subspecies and the Indian would bear some other subspecific name. Only the latter would appear in an Indian checklist while the former would find place only in the Malayan checklist. Thus, for example, on pp, 64-65 of Synopsis you do not find the nominate Falco peregrinus peregrinus because the species was first described from Northamptonshire, England, and later found to occur in other parts of the world also."

Indian Barn Owl in Bhuj (Kachchh) by S.N. Varu

On 7.6.78, I and my friend Mr. N.N. Bapat were passing near Uplipad area of Bhuj in the evening. We saw a gentleman carrying an Indian Barn Owl, and on inquiring he said that it had entered his house in the red hill area to escape from house crows which were attacking it. He intended to release it at night.

In the Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan by Dr. Salim Ali and Ripley, it is stated that the "Barn Owl's range is all over India" but its occurrence in Kutch is not recorded specifically. Thus it seems to be a somewhat rare species in Kutch. In the "Birds of Kutch" by Dr. Salim Ali, a reference is made to a record by Lester & Newnham.

Correspondence

The Storkbilled Kingfisher by Sarah Jameson

A few times in the past few months I have heard a bird call that has baffled me, so imagine my excitement when on May 12th I heard it very close to the house. At the corner of the garden stands

a beautiful old Eucalyptus Globulus, and below it the ground falls away almost sheer to a stream about 300 feet below. At the end of a bare branch about 40 feet up was sitting a kingfisher, flaunting its gay colours in the bright morning sun. As it sat still for about five minutes I was able to have a very good look at it with the binoculars, and was surprised to find it was a Brownheaded Storkbilled Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis Capensis*). It was a dazzling sight with its huge blood-red bill, brown head and shimmering turquoise upperparts.

I quote from Dr. Salim Ali's "Birds of Kerala"... "Slightly smaller than the Pigeon. Distinguished from all other Kingfishers by its large size and enormous bloodred dagger shaped bill. Head dark greyish brown, upperparts brilliant pale blue with a yellowish collar on hindneck. Chin and throat whitish, rest of underparts ochraceous buff. Sexes alike, singly or separated pairs, on forest streams. Resident, fairly common. Chiefly foot hills country to an elevation of about 1,500 feet, rarely to 3,000 feet." I saw this bird at an elevation of about 6,000 feet, so it would be interesting to find out whether this kingfisher has now become established at a much higher altitude than formerly, or whether it was a rare straggler. I saw only the one bird, and its call is rather reminiscent of the long drawnout "watery" whistle of the Iora. Dr. Salim Ali writes that it also has a "raucous, explosive chattering 'laugh' but at no time did I hear this call

Crows and Kites by Harkirat S. Sangha

The daily routine is like this - in the afternoon some kites are seen soaring high up in the sky, near the temples (my observation were made, primarily, of the temples around Choti Chaupar). Others, not up, seem rather inactive creatures. Many choose a convenient vantage point and sit for long periods patiently. They scrutinise the temple compounds for would be "food tossers" (mostly pakoras are tossed).

The people while tossing the 'food' call kites. No wonder, soon they start circling the caller, ever watchful for likely tossed food. The kites cleverly catch the food with their claws. Quite often, they do miss inspite of skillful manoeuvres. During this 'toss and catch' act their shrill calling continues.

One striking habit of kites is that they dislike carrying the food to an 'eating post'. I have observed, that they prefer to finish it while soaring before going for another round.

They eat the food which they hold in their claws by flexing their necks down at the same time extending the claws forward to facilitate the act of eating. But why so? Possibly, because many times House crows come and harass the kites while eating.

Need for Editorial blue pencil by KK Neelakantan

"With reference to Dr. Madhav Gadgil's note on page 10 of the July issue, should one say, 'Those eminent hunters, the lion and the jackal' just because, on occasion, the lion and the jackal both pick bones from the same carcass? - *Canis aureus*."

Handicapped crow by SS Saini

It was during the winter of 1975-76 that I visited my native place in the Punjab. One day I was watching the crows feeding on the left over crumbs of food and some grains of jowar. One crow was eating in a very peculiar fashion, by tilting its head to one side and then picking up the food. When watched carefully I found that half of the upper portion of its beak was missing. After this it was a pleasure to see this crow eating.

During the winter of 1976-77 again I visited that place to find this crow in the same state but quite healthy. In fact I found this crow to be more clever than the other ones. In spite of my best efforts, the crow did not pose for a photograph.

I think this abnormality in the beak may be the result of some fight, the crow might have had with other crows or some other birds. But the adaptability of this bird seems to be remarkable. I did not find any ill effects of the abnormal beak on the health and behaviour of the bird. I do not know if such abnormality is common in birds.

Our Contributors

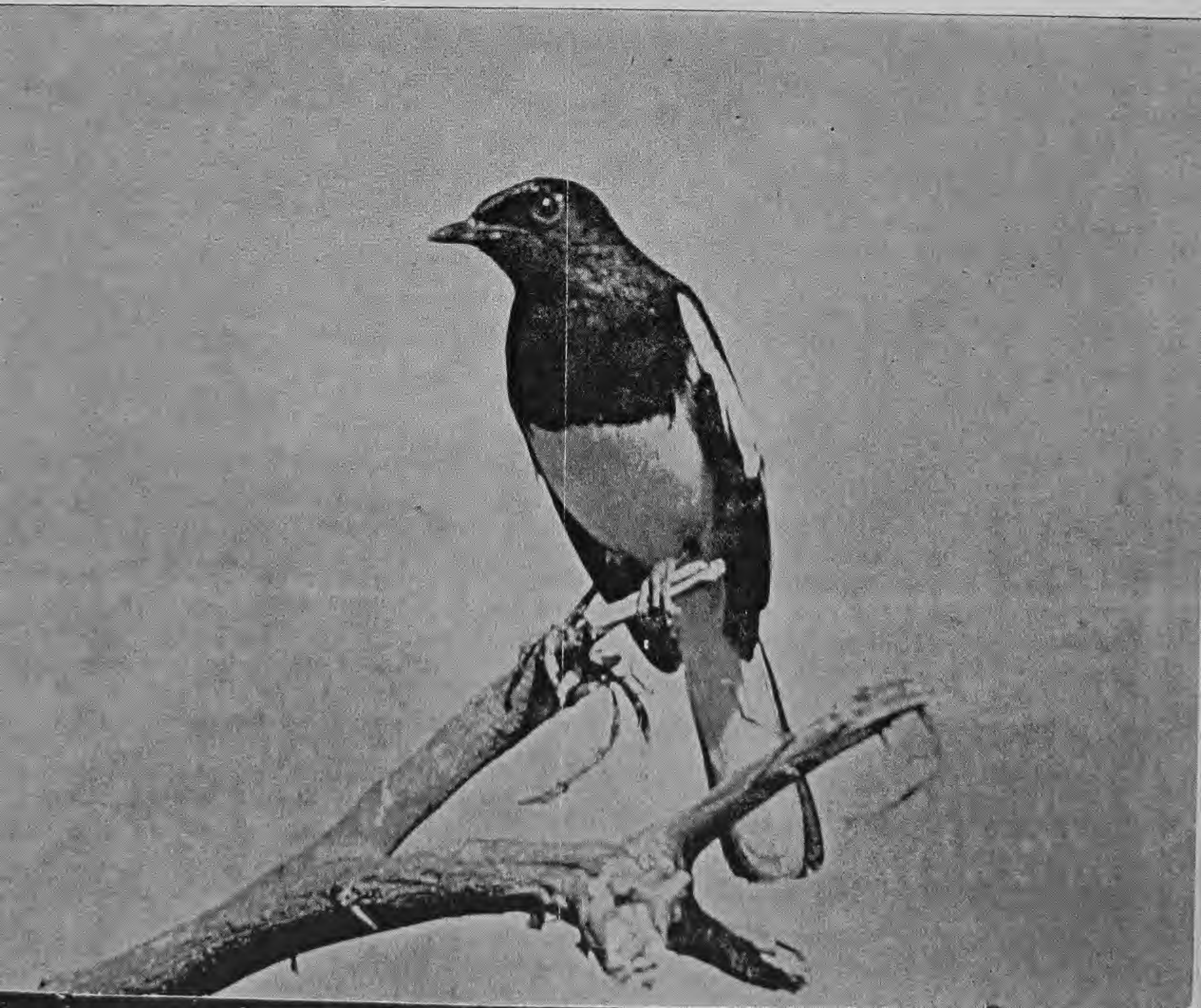
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Our Contributors

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Birding in Ginjee by V.J. Rajan

On 16th July, 1978, two of us, Shri. Koneri Rao and I went to the historic old Fort of Ginjee, about 150 Kms. from Madras on the Madras - Tiruvannamalai route. The Fort was built around 1,200-1,250 A.D. and comprises of 3 hills Rajagiri (800 feet) and Krishnagiri (650 feet) are tourist attractions and are being well maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. The hills and Fort are surrounded by cultivated fields, while the Fort area itself has a fair amount of scrub jungle which supports a certain amount of bird life.

The Government Transport bus takes about 4 hours to go from Madras to Ginjee (Fare Rs.7-40). We arrived there at about 4.30 p.m. and went to the "Krishnagiri" part of the Fort. We were greeted by dozens of brahminy mynas (Sturnus pagodarum) and common mynas (Acridotheres tristis). Most of the brahminy mynas were carrying food and nesting material in the Fort area. Another bird seen in profusion was the Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata). This appears to be their breeding season and most of them have their nests in the crevices between the stones on the ramparts. We looked inside two of the nests and in each of them there were 3 black glistening youngsters whose eyes were not yet open and the nest was lined by a few fibres and nothing else. Shining our torch on the chicks produced no reaction, but immediately after we went about 50 meters away, mama robin took some titbit into the nest.

Hearing a commotion on the wall above, we were just in time to see two tree pies (Dendrocitta vagabunda) and a shikra (Accipiter badius) flying away. Three or four redvented bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer) also flew off, but in different directions. From the ramparts we could see 10-12 whiteheaded babblers (Turdoides affinis) on the ground in the harvested fields, and dozens of palm swifts were darting about among the palmyra trees bordering the fields and Fort. A brainfever bird (Cuculus varius) was calling in the distance. A pied kingfisher (Ceryle rudis) and a whitebreasted kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis) were sharing our solitude probably waiting for us to quit their roosting place. A pale half moon was overhead and we could see several spotted owlets (Athene brama) flying out of the Fort wall holes. It was all quiet and peaceful and we left at 7.30 p.m.

Next morning at 6 a.m. we were back at the ramparts of the Fort on the "Rajagiri" side. As the main gate to the Fort is open for public only between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., we went exploring the scrub jungle between the hills of the Fort. It is rocky and strewn with huge boulders with 3 natural ponds amidst the scrubby jungle-like wild growth. We first saw two redwinged bush lark (Mirafra erythroptera) gracefully parachuting downwards and flying up to repeat the performance. All around were brahminy mynas and Indian Robins gathering food for their young. Being the Mango season, batches of green parakeets were flying overhead towards the Bangloora-Mango orchards. A Hoopoe (Upupa epops) and two redvented bulbuls sat on the electric wire followed by three green bee-eaters (Merops orientalis). We saw that two of them did not have the usual pinlike projection on their tails. Two purplerumped sunbird (Nectarinia zeylonica) were flitting about. In a dilapidated structure to our left 4 spotted owlets were observing us intently from their holes in the walls.

A pied crested cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) flew in from our right and entered a bush. We went near the bush and though we were just 6 feet away and it could see us, it made no move to get away. We could see that every 10 or 12 seconds a spasm went through its body and the tail jerked up. We watched it for 6 minutes and it neither attempted to fly away nor did its spasms stop. On the right, there is a big tank. Over 15 redrumped swallows were picking slushy mud from one corner of the tank and flying off, and more were coming for the same purpose. Several crag martins and houseswifts were also flying about. On the other end of the tank 5 or 6 village belles were bathing and on the tank bund were their long shrub-chopping heavy knives.

We prudently moved away.

By now, it was 9 a.m. and we entered the Rajagiri Fort entrance. The entrance fee is 50 ps. per head, collected by the A.S.I.

On our left, we found the "Elephant Tank" so called because there is a separate gate with an inclined ramp to enable the elephants to have a dip in the deep tank in days gone by.

Three pied kingfishers were the only occupants of the tank now. On our right was the Kalyan Mahal with the multistoried tower, out of which 2 magpie robins (Copsychus saularis) flew out into the red berry laden banyan tree where a dozen monkeys were eating the ripened berries. Now in front of us were the stairs to climb the 800 feet high Rajagiri Hill. Numerous house swifts, redrumped swallows and crag martins were flying about us.

After about 300-350 feet up the stiff climb, we came to some flat ground and here, above the "Kamalakanni Amman Temple", on a sheer rocky wall about 300 feet high and right above the temple in a rock crevice, we saw a shrieking shahin falcon (Falco peregrinator). Every few minutes, it sallied forth like a house swift and came back to its perch, and from the amount of white marking just below the perch, it looked as if its nest was inside the crevice. About 20 feet to its right was another shahin falcon looking majestically below. Occasionally it would preen itself with its yellow foot. Though we watched it for over an hour it never moved out of its spot while the first one was restless and regularly flew out in circles, shrieking. We did not see it catching any birds though many swifts, swallows, crag martins were flying about. A couple of shikras were also seen and 3 white scavenger vultures (Neophron percnopterus) were sailing serenely in the upper atmosphere.

It was 12 a.m. and we moved down and noted several large black lizards (Psammophilis dorsalis) with red heads and necks, two black bellied finch larks (Eremopterix grisea), one redwinged bush lark (Mirafra erythroptera) and a pair of small minivets (Pericrocotus cinnamomeus).

After lunch we boarded the bus at 2 p.m., hot, tired but happy. After 10 kms away in a place called Vallam, we saw about 15 white scavenger vultures in a field and 4 or 5 flying in to join the others. As the bus was moving at 60 k.m. per hour we could observe nothing else. All along the trunk road were tamarind trees in bloom, gulmohar trees in flaming red, and on the telegraph wires were seen whitebreasted kingfishers, pied kingfishers, blue jays, black drongos and two blackwinged kite (Elanus caeruleus). They helped us to forget the long tiresome 4 hour bus journey.

Birding in Nagpur by Jay Armour

As is always typical on any birdwalk, we found that our time had run out before our interest, and we had to force ourselves to return. As we were turning around, one of the people with us noticed a large brown shape in the very tree in which I was observing the minivets. Thinking it was some small mammal, she was about to point it out to us. This bird, obviously having kept an eye on us all along, realized it had been discovered and flew from its hiding place on great outstretched wings and making not a sound. It stopped on another branch more in the

5

open eyes and outstretched ear-like tufts upon its head. We were totally amazed, for we were looking at the indian great horned owl, a sight that can transform any ordinary bird walk into a most memorable experience. I found it difficult to realize a bird as large as this had been able to remain hidden from my sight while I watched birds many times smaller move around nearby. We stood still, looking at it for 10 minutes, waiting for it to do something. And it stood still, looking at us for 10 minutes, no doubt waiting for us to do something.

Again, we had to remind ourselves of the time. We had to return. And so we wandered back to the car, noticing other birds, but not really observing them closely, for our minds were filled with a most wonderful sight. Then David Fernandes saw an interesting sight on the water. There was a cormorant trying to swallow a snake. Again, a sight I had never seen before. And I may never see again. I knew this bird feeds on fish, but also snakes? Even Dr. Salim Ali claims that cormorants "feed exclusively on fish". Cormorants don't kill fish before swallowing them. And so this cormorant had no knowledge of how to kill this snake. It was attempting to swallow it live, and obviously having a difficult time doing so.

Before climbing back into the car I took one last look at where we had just been. This land has no value for agriculture or development. But what we saw during this walk is a testimonial to the potential it could have as a park. I am sure there must be so many places near large cities all over India with a wealth of birdlife just waiting to be discovered.

Birding at Dhonsa Jheel (Kutch) by S.N. Varu

Our birdwatching started on the 10th December 1977 at 8 a.m. and we were going towards Dhonsa Jheel which is 10 km. from Bhuj. The Jheel was full of reeds which provided shelter as well as food for water birds.

We saw a whitebreasted kingfisher on the old Fort. Many lesser whitethroats were seen on the "piloo" trees. We noticed a pipit on the road side but we could not identify it. On the way to the little pond we saw a solitary green sandpiper and a white wagtail.

Near the Australian Babul trees which were introduced in Kutch we noticed a Kashmir Redstart and a redtailed chat in the bush. We heard the marshal's iona. Near a meadow several greynecked buntings were observed flying about. Rufoustailed Finchlarks and Ashycrowned Finchlarks were noticed. We saw a Grey Shrike in possession of a Grasshopper.

Whitethroated munias were observed in small groups. Rufousfronted-wren-warblers were active on a tree.

After a 2 1/2 hour walk we arrived at Dhonsa Jheel, which was full of birds. A pair of sarus cranes with a juvenile, were noted feeding on the reed bed. Dabchicks were commonly seen.

Pond Herons were busy in search of food on the bank of the Jheel. Cattle Egrets were seen near herds of cattle.

I focussed my binoculars on the Jheel and was pleased to find so many waterfowl flying about.

Coots and Indian Moorhens swam around in the Jheel, and Purple Moorhens were sighted feeding on the reed bed. Resident ducks, grey duck and cotton teal were observed swimming in the water. Migratory ducks, the shoveller, pintail and wigeon were also present. Grey ducks and Indian Moorhens were noticed with juveniles. Pheasanttailed Jacanas flew in and out of the reeds with their loud cries. They were in non-breeding plumage. A solitary blackwinged stilt, a common sandpiper and a green sandpiper were noticed on the shore. Common swallows were observed flying along the water edges. A great reed warbler was perched on a reed. The arrival of a marsh harrier caused some consternation.

We heard a crow pheasant, and a whitebreasted and common kingfisher were observed flying over the water in search of food. Greynecked buntings and striolated buntings were seen near the Jheel. A tailor bird sang from a tree. Yellow headed wagtails were observed feeding on the shore and a rufous backed shrike perched on another tree.

The whitecheeked bulbul, redvented bulbul, indian robin, ringed dove, little brown dove, common babbler, purple sunbird and little green bee-eater were common near the Jheel.

On our return journey, we saw a pale harrier and 5 kestrels flying at a high altitude. Black drongos were observed perched on electrical wire.

Bird Watching in Mt Abu (Condensed from an article by Deepak D'Souza)

My interest in birds developed while I was a boarder at St. Mary's School in Mt Abu, a hill station in the Aravalli range. A large number of birds are attracted to the luxuriant vegetation of this area which is being made a game sanctuary.

Among the birds of prey and scavengers one could see, among others, the shikra, the Egyptian vulture, the Bengal vulture, pariah kite, barn owl, shrikes and tree pies.

The four lakes - Plummy dam, Upper Kodra, Lower Kodra and Nukky Lake have large concentrations of fish and attract many birds such as grebes, kingfishers, cormorants, pochards, geese, brahminy ducks and wagtails.

The majority of the Mt Abu birds were insectivorous. I often watched tailor birds, flycatchers, fantails, Franklin's wren warblers and on rare occasions, ashy wren warblers. I also saw the Indian Robin, the magpie robin, the shama, iora, yellow-cheeked tit, bee-eaters, swallows, swifts, martins, babblers, mynas, drongos and woodpeckers.

Of the fruit eaters I saw redwhiskered bulbuls, redvented bulbuls, coppersmiths, large barbets, Alexandrine parakeets, roseringed parakeets, orioles and white eyes.

I was lucky to see the courtship display of the jungle fowl; the male fluffs its feathers, lowers its wings and hops into the air with a raucous cry. But sometimes the female is too busy eating to bother!

I also watched a baybacked shrike kill a chameleon and spike it on a date palm.

A frightened purple moorhen by TV Jose

On May 19th, 1972 I got a purple moorhen which had been injured in one eye by a shikari. During the period I nursed it, I noticed that as I approached the bird it lowered its body to the ground sitting still, its neck and head almost level with its body. It watched my movements carefully but did not move. After I went away it adopted the same procedure until it could find a corner of the room in which to hide itself.

If I walked towards it, it would get up and run and attempt to fly away. When about to catch it, it would assume a threatening

pose with its feathers fluffed out and wings held above the body. If I ignored its threat and caught it, it would emit an alarm call apparently by the constriction of the air passage in its throat rather than by the vibration of vocal chords. Afterwards if I let it go it would run away to freeze itself again.

Regarding its food, it seemed to prefer paddy grains soaked in water. It also ate fish, molluscs, crabs and earthworms. To deal with large pieces of food the bird picks it up in its beak and standing on one leg, it raises the other to take the food in its mouth and hold it tight in its toes. Though the toes are too long and inefficient for this job it can get a fairly good grip if it employs its hind toe which is the shortest. Once the food is securely placed the bird tears out the fleshy portions piece by piece with its strong mandibles and gulps it down, standing on one leg.

Rare Tibetan crane located in Ladakh (Courtesy The Indian Express)

Two pairs of the Tibetan crane also known as the black-necked crane have been located in Ladakh, and their living habits are being studied.

- 7 The Tibetan crane is among the rarest of the 14 species of cranes found in the world. It normally breeds at high altitudes (14,000 feet above) in the remote and inaccessible parts of Ladakh, Tibet and South China.

One of the pairs was found breeding in a remote marsh, enclosed on all sides by high sand-dunes and extensive barren lands. The nest made of aquatic plants, contained two eggs.

An investigative party led by Mr. Prakash Gole, honorary representative of the World Wildlife Fund-India in Pune, has photographed the pair at close range. Mr. Gole was assisted, among others, by Mr. Shrikant Ingalkar, an employee of TELCO, Pune, Mr. Lavkumar Khacher will continue the investigation.

The remoteness of their breeding grounds and the inaccessibility of the region on political grounds, has deterred scientists from studying the birds in their own habitats. It is hoped that the present study will provide useful information for rearing these birds in captivity to increase their numbers.

Dear Junior Subscriber, - this is now your page of our Newsletter, and since it is always a good idea to begin at the beginning, let's start with a discussion on your views on bird-watching.

All articles, comments, suggestions, in short, anything that you, Junior Subscriber, have to say on birds or about this page (remember, it's only a page!) may please be addressed to: Mrs. Indira Kohli, 36, Balbir Avenue, Dehradun 248001, U.P. India.

I now hand the page over to you, and here's the first article -

Waiting for Godot by Rahul Kohli

Bird watching is not very popular with us the younger generation, as out door entertainment, because (a) there is no excitement, like shooting or fishing which fulfil man's inborn hunting instinct, (b) one doesn't know what to look for! A youngster's idea of fun certainly isn't sitting in a field identifying birds all day.

What I am actually trying to say is that if bird watching is ever going to become a popular hobby then the image it projects: octogenarians spending a day in the woods identifying, must be changed.

Bird watching must be given a whole new angle. When we read bird watching magazines we read about bird censuses, bird sightings and our first reaction is "Oh my God, this is going to be killing". The magazine is put down and we regret ever having picked it up. The Junior page has got to hold our interest.

I suggest we should be briefed about bird behaviour: a study that is as revolutionary as it is interesting.

It was through a book on ethology that my interest in birds was aroused. The author while talking of birds said the robin males would arrive at the breeding grounds before the females; and territories would be fought over and established. The males without territories would not mate but would hang about at the periphery of the territory of a propertied male and if he infringed on it, he would be promptly driven off. The confidence of the propertied

male on his territory was so great that he never once saw the owner driven off his territory, even though the intruder was a larger bird. So strong was the urge to hold the territory that the observer once saw a weasel make its way towards a nest; the male and female were frantic with worry and did all they could be to distract the weasel but the moment they noticed another robin infringe on their territory they left the weasel and chased the intruder off. This they did, not once, but several times during that encounter. David Lack in his book "The Life of the Robin" recorded that a robin will only sing within his territory and that the song was used to keep other birds away; if it failed only then would it attack. He discovered through experiment that it would take just a tuft of red feathers on their territory to infuriate these robins. Lack also witnessed a scene of a fair absurdity when his robins with their breasts fluffed out turned in arcs of a 180° while they displayed their fighting plumage to a bunch of feathers a few inches away.

Later I noticed that the purple sunbird that lived in our garden would chase any other purple sun birds away from our R Russellia and Beleperon but never said boo to a honey-sucker that would sit on the same boughs. (which kind of sucker is this? Editor)

So let us hope that the Junior Page is not cluttered with material about bird sightings (there is enough of this in the rest of the magazine), material to teach youngsters its habitat, the number of eggs it lays etc. but material that is thought provoking. Material that creates, if nothing else, a bird awareness.

Talking of the number of eggs a bird lays, Lack has recorded that the Great tit clutch size was greatest (11-12) when caterpillar appeared in greatest profusion and in 1951 when the clutch size dropped to 8, the caterpillars were a minimum.

Convenient population regulation, What?

Nest Decoration by Mr. Pankaj Kumar

This refers to decoration of nests by some birds reported in July 78 Issue of our Newsletter. I think decoration as described by Mr. Sreekumar in the case of Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis) is confined to certain regions only. There are many nests of Common Myna around my hostel and none of them has feathers outside. On the other hand I have yet to come across a nest of the Pied Myna which does not have a strip of cloth hanging outside its nest. This true for this area (IIT campus) at least.

Last winter I visited Allen Forest, Kanpur, along with a friend. We saw a Crested Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela), Blackheaded Oriole (Oriolus xanthornus) and Whitebellied Drongo (Dicrurus caeruleus). What surprised us most was a big flock of about 50-60 Scarlet Minivet (Pericrocotus flammeus) females. Not a single male could be spotted in that area which we visited again after sometime; and once again we saw the same scene. We have not seen male Scarlet Minivets in the IIT campus either. I don't believe we could have missed such a brightly coloured bird. Could some one clarify?

A Census of Breeding Birds of India by G.L. Keswani

I whole-heartedly welcome the idea of carrying out census of breeding birds of India as expressed by you in the June issue of the Newsletter.

It is encouraging to note that the British Trust for Ornithology - Irish wild-bird conservancy has brought out "The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Britain and Ireland". This is as Madhav Gadgil says, the fruit of labour of thousands of amateur birdwatchers. Our task may be more difficult as India is a vast country, but still we can take some guidance from the above mentioned Atlas and make a beginning. I should like to be associated with such a census.

Court of Crows by K. Surendra Singh

I would like to mention one incident which might be interesting for birdwatchers. Once I had occasion to watch an oper Court held by crows at Calcutta. It was long ago sometime in the winter of 1957. I was sitting in front of a big house in Alipore. The house had a very big lawn surrounded on each side by tall trees. All of a sudden there was some commotion on one Pipal tree which attracted my attention. In a few minutes time a large number of

crows numbering about 50 came down to the lawn in front of me about 50 m. away and sat in a perfect circle, in silence. That was an unusual scene for me and I watched the whole drama most attentively. Thereafter two crows escorted another bigger crow, and he occupied the middle position in the circle. The "escorting party" left the place went to the same tree and brought back another crow. That crow occupied a place just in front of the King Crow. It was followed by a consultation among the sitting crows with each of them leaning toward their neighbour and this created some noise. In a few minutes time one of the escorting crows went near the accused crow and made some assaults on his body which he tolerated quietly. Thereafter the leader crow was first escorted back to the same tree by the escorting party.

"A Curious Habit of Common Myna" comment by Indra Kumar Sharma

Mr. Neelakantan has raised an interesting question, "Whether a feather of crow was used by the Common Myna in its nest for decorative purpose or as a pointer" in the above mentioned title (NLBW July 1978).

I have seen several cases of the Myna using Pigeon, Parakeet and other feathers for lining its nest it would seem that these are for comfort rather than for decoration.

Our Contributors

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Mr. Jay Armour :- A young American from Philadelphia has been in India since October, 1977 -- working with World Wildlife Fund-India, on a voluntary basis. Mr. Armour's chief area of work has been with WWF-India's Nature Club Movement, which he has chosen to work upon as his final project -- to complete his college education. During his stay in India, primarily in Bombay and for a while in Bangalore, Mr. Armour has spent his time visiting Nature Clubs.

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Subscriptions for 1978 have been received from:

Mr. Suresh Kumar, Elamon House, Thycaud, Trivandrum 695014 : Rs.10/-;
Mr. K.J. Sekar, 7, Nandanam, Extension, Madras 600 035 : Rs.5/-;
Prof. John C. Jacob, President, Zoological Club, Payyanur 670307 Rs.15/-; Mr. K.S.R. Krishna Raju, 21-A, Kirlampudi Colony, Visakhapatnam 530 003 : Rs.30 (For two years) ; Mr. Vinoo Narain Mathur, Bungalow No.239, Railway Colony, Gandhinagar (Kutch), Gujarat. : Rs.15/-; Flt. Lt. S. Rangaswami (Retd.) 2, II Main Road, TNHB Colony, Madras 600 085 : Rs.15/-; Mr. A.K. Chakravarthy, 509, Sri Lakshmi Nilayam, II Stage, Rajajingar, Malleshwaram West P.O., Bangalore : Rs.15/-; Shri HSH Hussainy, Wildlife Research Scholar, Flaming Forest Rest House, Kodikkarai 614807, Tanjore District, Tamil Nadu Rs.10/-
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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
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Black Kites in Geneva II by Aamir Ali.

Last year, a pair of Black Kites (Milvus migrans) nested near our house in Geneva and raised a family of two. I wrote an account of this which was published in the Newsletter of October 1977. For the four months that we watched them, they became a part of our lives. This year, they came again and raised another family of two. I am assuming that they were the same pair; there is no way of proving this but I would like to see the man who can shake my conviction that this was so.

This year we were watching for the return of the Black Kites in spring. On 14 March, I thought I saw two from the office window circling in the distance but could not be sure. By coincidence, that evening I ran into a man in the local supermarket, complete with beard and beret, whom I had met a couple of weeks earlier on a birdwatching outing. Before I could even greet him, he burst out: I think the Black Kites have come. I thought I saw a couple in the distance, but as I was teaching a teenager class, I could not take time off to look properly. We agreed that our two half-sightings should be counted as one full one. Two days later, I definitely saw one. Last year, I had seen the first one on 17 March. The Kites, like Caesar's soothsayer, seem attracted by the Ides of March.

On 26th March, I saw what I assumed to be our friend from last year, near the house, circling and then sitting on the large tree that used to be a favourite perching place. On the 29th, I saw it with a twig in his beak. By good fortune, the Editor of our Newsletter was visiting us. He thought that they might very well use the same nest as last year. This was confirmed on 1 April (a very suitable day?) when one of the Kites was seen taking a twig to the old nest and obviously doing some spring touching up.

Names: From my reading of animal behaviour books, I had realised that it was important to give names to our two Kites. At my son's suggestion, we called the male Igor; to make up for this exotic idea, we gave the female the prosaic name of Jane. As I could not even begin to tell one from the other, the names were meaningless. However, they gave us satisfaction and seemed to raise the status of our observations.

I have used these names in this article without any justification whatsoever: Igor might well have been Jane and vice versa. Is there a way of telling them apart?

Nest building and Twigs: For the next few days, both were around frequently. Several times, they were together at the nest, discussing affairs and arranging things. They did not seem as active builders as last year, but of course there was much less to build. Last year's nest seemed to be in good condition - indeed, somewhat better condition than our own house which had to be repainted. I took it rather hard that while I spent several weekends working hard at this repainting, they seemed to be taking life very easy.

At my wife's suggestion, I put out a dozen large twigs on the lawn; Jane deigned to pick one up but left the others. I had to pick them up myself when I next mowed the lawn.

Do twigs have some special significance? On 30 April, when the eggs were about a fortnight old, Igor arrived at the nest with a twig in his beak. Jane, who was sitting on the eggs, immediately flew off and Igor took her place. An hour and a half later, there was a repeat performance of this, though I would like to assume that this time it was Jane who arrived with the twig in her beak and Igor, happily released from domestic duties, who flew off. Three hours later, there was another change of guard but without any twigs. On 20 June, some 39 days after the eggs were hatched, Jane circled around with a large twig, about 8 inches long, in her talons. She transferred this to her beak and then landed on the nest. For over half an hour she just sat there holding the twig in her beak; then finally placed it in the nest. During this time, Igor once passed nearby, shrilling loudly.

On another occasion, about 41 days after the eggs were hatched, Igor sat on a nearby tree with what looked like a bunch of grass in his beak. He flew off, circled and landed on the nest. Was this for repairs? Or decoration?

The Permissive Society: On 2 April, the Kites copulated. Jane was sitting on a branch; Igor arrived with 'whipped puppy screams' and landed on her with much flapping of wings. The performance was repeated about an hour later.

Over the nest few weeks, similar performances took place several times, with 'whipped puppy screams' and flapping of wings. As the leaves on the trees increased, it was more difficult to see what was going on. Could it have meant copulation every time? The performance was heard and seen about a dozen times in the next three months. The last time was on 1 July when the young ones were about 50 days old. If it did mean copulation every time, then Bravo for the Kites: six seems to be divorced from purely reproductive needs and the Kites seem not only quite human in their behaviour but well up with the times. Can anyone provide information on the sex life of Kites?

Three types of Calls: I have referred to the 'whipped puppy screams' above. Last year I said that Kites had two types of calls: the whipped puppy scream, and the normal, serene shrilling usually when the Kite is scaring high up. There is a third call that I noted this year: a staccato Wheeh whi-whi. Like the whipped puppy scream, it is an agitated call. Perhaps an alarm call?

It is difficult to believe that these cries did not have some meaning or were not used for communication. The whipped puppy scream, as I have said, seemed to announce that sex was raising its ugly head; until early July, it was only heard when the couple were together. However, in late July, after the young ones had left the nest, on two occasions I heard it for rather long periods and though in neither instance could the bird be seen, I believed that it was in flight rather than perched. If not exclusively sexual, what is the significance of this scream?

The staccato call certainly sounded very agitated. Yet, on one occasion, while Jane was at the nest with the fledglings, Igor flew nearby giving out this call without any noticeable effect on his mate. No reaction, no jerking up of the head or perking up of the ears.

Sportive Crows: At first, the crows seemed a little less aggressive than last year in their attacks on the Kites. Last year, there were three regular sportsmen who waited on a nearby tree, ready to swoop into attack the moment one of the Kites left the nest or approached it. This year, the attacks were less frequent and milder in the early stages but picked up momentum. Thus once just after the eggs were laid, Jane flew off from the nest and was immediately chased by a couple of crows. She came zooming home straight back to the nest with the crows in full cry after her. On another occasion, about a fortnight after the eggs were laid, Igor was sitting on a nearby branch and was 'buzzed' fiercely by a crow about 10 times within a couple of minutes. At each attack, Igor had to open his wings in defence and to prevent himself from falling off. On another occasion, when he was being chased, he seemed to check suddenly to midair to throw the crows off his trail - without much success. A couple of days later, when he was being chased again, he seemed to turn and chase one of the crows for a short while. The attacks by the crows continued throughout the period the nest was in use and the adults around.

The nest was often left unguarded; why don't the crows attack the eggs or the young ones?

Defecation: Last year, the editor of the Newsletter added a note to my account of the Kites, referring to ".....the interesting time I had in Andheri watching the nest of a Pariah Kite on a palm tree. I was surprised to find that the young birds had very sanitary habits and they used to reverse perilously close to the edge from the centre of the nest before defecating. The nest must therefore have been perfectly hygienic."

I had not seen this behaviour and was rather narked about it. This year I was luckier and noted it, exactly as described. It was also noticeable that when the young ones were big enough to venture out on the branch outside the nest, the branch was soon streaked with white. They were fussy about their nest but, like most citizens, much less so about public property.

Feeding: It was on rare occasions that I saw the parents bringing food to the nest. Last year I had wondered if the Kites regurgitated food for their young; this year I saw no signs of this.

On 9 May, when the fledglings were about 25 days old, our charwoman saw Igor swoop down and pick up a squirrel from our garden. She reported that there were loud screams - presumably the squirrel's - and it was altogether a very dramatic and distressing incident. I suppose the squirrel was ultimately fed to the young ones. Igor's popularity declined sharply with my wife, who, on the whole, finds squirrels more lovable than Kites.

About three weeks later, my wife and son saw Igor arrive on his favourite perching spot with a large fish in its claws. It sat on the branch for a long time, just holding it. Presumably, it was also ultimately used to feed the family.

A week later, I saw Jane arrive at the nest with what looked like a dead mouse in her beak. This was definitely fed to the young ones, now about 23 days old.

Twice, just about the time I thought the eggs had hatched, Igor was in our garden, pecking at the ground at the foot of a small fruit tree. Did he pick up something? What?

Once I sat for about two hours watching the nest in the hope of seeing food being brought but was disappointed. I suppose the young ones were not fed more than once or twice a day.

Time Table: The time table of the family life of Igor and Jane works out approximately as follows.

26 March-14 April : Deciding to use old nest and refurbishing it.

14 April: Two eggs laid.

11 May (28 days later): Eggs hatched.

3 June (22 days after hatching): Fluffy heads of fledglings visible above rim of the nest.

15 June (34 days old): Fledglings quite dark in colour though still white under the wings. Flapping their wings.

28 June (47 days old): Young one sitting outside nest on branch.

10 July (59 days old): Young ones left nest.

Like last year, I had to leave Geneva on 2 July, before the young ones had left the nest. I asked my son to keep watch and note when they left the nest. He reported that the nest was empty after 10 July. I would not put too much faith in this date because he was very busy during this period celebrating most energetically the end of exams.

Last year's time table was approximately as follows.

I had guessed that the eggs had been laid on 28 May and hatched on 10 June, 14 days later. Mr. S.K. Reeves, in the Newsletter of December 1977, commented on the incubation and said:

"Mr. Aamir Ali's supposition that the incubation period for a period was 13-14 days is manifestly incorrect, as that is about the incubation period for a bird about the size of a Bulbul. The period for a bird of the size of the Black Kite would be, at the very least, twice as long. Obviously, he was unable to determine exactly when incubation commenced."

Too right, as the Australians say. The nest was some 50 metres above the ground and it was impossible to look into it. The dates were guesses based on the way the adults behaved. Last year I was obviously very wrong and the eggs must have been laid about 14, not 28, May, if they really hatched about 10 June. This would mean that this year everything took place a month earlier.

Last year, I estimated the young left the nest about 19 July, when they were 39 days old. This year, I estimated that they left on 10 July, when they were 59 days old. If this were right, the birds took 20 days longer to graduate from the nest than in 1977. This seems improbable, and so I suppose something was wrong somewhere.

It must be the dates of egg-laying and hatching that were wrong this year, or last year, or both. In order to be certain one would have had to build a rickety tower such as is illustrated on page 167 of the Book of Indian Birds,

(10th edition) or seems to accompany articles in the Audubon Society's Journal quite often. Moreover, this year the spring and summer were even wetter and more intemperate than last year, so observations were often restricted.

Once the young had gone, though Kites were often around in the neighbourhood, the garden was no longer a centre for activity and it was rare to see one in their usual tree.

I wonder if the nest will be used again next year?

Struggle for existence by Ananta Mitra

On 10-10-1965 my colleague (PK Sen Gupta) and I located a pair of Pallas's Fishing Eagle (Haliaeetus leucorhynchus) at the southern tip of the Salt Lake near Calcutta. This extensive swampy area of about 87 sq.km. is being progressively swallowed up by the City. It is almost devoid of large trees. Only in the villages situated at its fringes, a few sizeable trees exist.

The Eagles had built a nest in a tall Cassia tree (Cassia siamea) in village Natun Deara about 4 miles east of Garia Railway Station. It was a big nest made of twigs put up at a height of about 40 feet above the ground.

One of the graceful pair was in the nest, and the other was on a nearby branch.

During 1966 and 1977 the pair built a nest and raised some young in the same locality.

In December 1968 (8-12-68) we found that the owner of the tree had cut down all the upper branches and the original nest was lost to the birds. Nevertheless, the birds did not lose heart. With care and perseverance they built a second nest in another large tree in the same village. It was a rain tree (Enterolobium saman) and a pretty big nest was erected at a height of about 35 feet from the ground.

From 1968 upto 1975 they continued to reside on the same tree. Year after year they repaired the nest and raised their young.

Unfortunately in 1975 this tree, too, was cut down and sold away by its owner. For the second time the birds became homeless but they refused to leave the habitat.

There was no other suitable tree in the neighbourhood, but through the village, there ran a high tension line, and above the tension ~~wires~~ they constructed a nest at a height of about 50 feet from the ground.

On 21-3-76 we visited the new nest and were happy to find a nestling raising its small downy head among the twigs. But the village-folk gave us the sad news that the people of the State Electricity Board had strongly resented to the setting up of the nest on their tower and would possibly pull it down.

However, on our next visit to the site 12-1276 we found the nest intact. We were a bit reassured and took a picture of the tower with the empty nest. Our complacency was short-lived and what we apprehended soon came about.

In March 1977 when the birds were rearing a nestling, the people of the Board came down upon them. Some of them with clubs mounted the tower and destroyed the nest and the nestling. The whole structure tumbled down.

The nest was gone, but the violator committed one unintentional mistake. After the rampage they allowed the nestling materials to remain at the base of the tower. The innocent birds soon returned to the site and before long started restructuring the nest at the original point. With care and devotion they lifted every stick and twig and built it up for the next brood.

Getting scent of their activity the SEB people soon reappeared and in February 1978 the whole drama of demolition was re-enacted. This time they did not commit the previous mistake; they carried the nesting materials away from the site.

Lamenting squeals from the birds were heard in the village for several days and ultimately the pair left their domicile for some unknown destination.

On 7-5-78 when I visited the site no trace of the nest or the birds was discernible. In spite of search and enquiry none could give me any clue about the Eagles. They were not heard of or found within or around the swamp.

This single example clearly shows how essential it is to maintain suitable trees within the Sanctuary at Salt Lake, Calcutta. This "unofficial" bird sanctuary containing 248 species of exquisite birds, 22 species of mammals, many reptiles, amphibians, etc. has existed here for centuries, and has never caused any harm or damage to our human existence.

It should be immediately given official recognition and necessary protection should be afforded to its fauna and flora. Delay will hasten local extinction of many useful and interesting species.

Birdwatching - response to Rahul Kohli, Junior Page by
Romulus Whitaker

When rough, tough snake hunters start bird watching you at first wonder what the world is coming to. Like, would a race car driver take ballet dancing lessons? But come to think of it a lot of people I know (myself included) have been bird watchers, bug watchers, lizard watchers and etc. watchers since we were in the cradle and saw that first gecko on the wall and the first crow in the garden. After plenty of practice you can learn to approach even timid birds to within spitting distance. Wearing drab clothes, learning to walk silently, move slowly, taking advantage of cover and the movements of the wind; these are a few of the skills (really hunter's skills) that you learn while trying to get close enough to birds to watch their way of life.

In some areas (like around Madras) birds ~~are~~ heavily hunted either by tribals (who at least eat their kill) or the catapult and wealthy air gun boys (who grow to enjoy killing). These birds are usually shy and won't allow you to approach too close; the word is out among the birds: "around here humans are deadly animals". At the opposite extreme, in densely forested valleys of the Andaman Islands or the friendly shelter of a garden, you can sometimes relax quietly and watch birds "do their thing" just a few feet away, completely natural and without fear. A young tree pie which looks fullgrown, flying around with its parents, has obviously not learned to feed itself. We watch the parents dig into a plantain left for them and stuff their young one's gaping mouth. The young one crouches and spreads its wings, trembling and quivering, fat butterball that it is, as if it had gone without food for a month.

Eating breakfast with a friend in Saurashtra, the babblers are unafraid and come on to the table to accept bits of bread; their raucous quarreling from so close drowns our conversation. It may take considerable patience and watching but you never fail to get excited at seeing a blackwinged kite hovering on the warm air currents and at last spotting and diving on an unlucky rat or lizard. We are professional birdwatchers at home, keeping a list of bird like this:

Date	Bird	Occasional visitor	Nesting resident	Remarks
20-8-78	Whitecapped Babbler		X	Nest in casuarina tree front of house

In the field we notice and make a simple bird list mainly to support our studies.

With birdwatching, like any natural pursuit, one thing leads to the next. You will notice the clear interaction of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, insects and plants in the web of nature and how important it is for this set up to remain undisturbed. You learn about the animals like monitor lizards, tree snakes and the mongoose, all of whom prey on birds at times. They prey of birds will also interest you, particularly when you watch a babbler stripping a stinging caterpillar of its hairs or a shrike skewering its beetle prey on a long babul thorn.

I will admit it, I like reptiles better than these johnny-come-lately feathered descendents of the magnificent dinosaurs. But birds are almost everywhere and you can easily satisfy your longing to watch how wild creatures act by learning the art of bird watching. The nice thing is you can indulge in this sport even if you unluckily get stuck in Calcutta or Bombay for a few days (or a few decades!). These cities may seem uninhabitable but there are a few spots the birds have not deserted. The city kid should get out to the country as much as possible, but he or she can also locate profitable birdwatching areas right in town.

So don't be misled, birdwatching makes a lot of sense for anyone with even a vague interest in wildlife and the living world. Birdwatching is always a good excuse for getting out into the countryside, to see new places. Automatically you get more confident and alert and start really seeing things like never before. You actually become part of the real world of nature. The crow with its hazardous nest on the 440 volt transformer shows us how to survive, in the thick of our artificial.

Rare Falcons Reintroduced in U.S.A.. Highly successful Project (Courtesy the World Wildlife Fund - India)

Bombay - Growing success of reintroducing Peregrine falcons to areas of the United States where they had been wiped out by DDT has been reported to the World Wildlife Fund.

Dr. Tom Cade, of Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology, reported that 42 young captive-bred Peregrines were released in 1976 making a total of 62 since 1974 when reintroduction started. He said that there was every reason to expect to raise well over 100 young in 1977 and to have reached 200 per year by 1978.

The young Peregrines are bred at the Cornell Laboratory and at another station opened in Colorado, which is specialising in the western subspecies. The World Wildlife Fund is providing financial support.

Two methods used

Two methods are used to put the birds into the wild. In the Western United States they are placed in the nests of wild Peregrines whose own eggs have failed to hatch. In the East it has been necessary to reintroduce the young Peregrines by adapting the methods of the Falconer for training birds called "hacking". Young birds are placed in a suitable nesting structure in broods of three to six before they can fly. They are guarded and fed until they catch their own food. This usually takes about 2 months.

Dr. Cade stated that a total of 55 young Peregrines had been hacked at 10 sites in 7 states. After losses for various reasons, including one killed by a human vandal, at least 37 became independent hunters.

Several birds released from hacking stations in 1975 returned during the breeding season in 1976 and pair formation and nesting attempts are expected this year.

The Peregrine falcon was probably the worst sufferer from the effects of the use of DDT pesticides in North America and Europe. The poisons got into the food of the falcons and accumulated in their bodies, causing direct deaths and breeding failure. Strict controls on use of DDT have been introduced now in most of the affected areas and it is hoped that the environment will gradually recover and support a new Peregrine population.

Correspondence

Invitation to Visit Hoshangabad by Shri A.P. Gupta

This is an invitation to birdwatchers to visit Hoshangabad which has a fairly large population of resident and, in winter, migratory birds. Hoshangabad is a railway station on the Bombay-Delhi and Madras-Delhi main lines of the Central Railway. Most of the mail and express trains stop at Hoshangabad. The hill resort of Pachmasti is situated in Hoshangabad district. Boarding and lodging can be arranged if prior intimation is given.

Pond Herons by M. D. Krishna

On the 13th of August 1978 (Time: 7-30 a.m.) at the Lalbagh lake Bangalore, I saw two Pond Herons (Ardeola grayii) hover (though awkwardly, and only for a short period) over the water at a particular point. They would flop down upon the water at times, pick up something from the water surface and then fly off. This activity was repeated by both the birds.

I would very much like to know if the readers have seen any other such similar behaviour which is unlike the 'wait and strike' method of these birds.

Dead Munias by ZF

Readers of the Newsletter will remember reports about birds dying as a result of dashing against walls. It was presumed that whitewashed walls against a particular angle of the sun become invisible to them for a brief second resulting in collision and calamity. Last week we found two whitethroated munias on the ground, a couple of feet away from a whitewashed wall. On examination it was found that both the birds had traces of "chunam" on their beaks, and one bird had its eyes bashed in. Obviously they had dashed against the wall in fast flight.

Spotted Doves by ZF

How long do these birds live? There is one in our garden with one leg deformed, and so identifiable, which has been here for the last 5 years. There was a nest in our alamanda shrub about a fortnight back. When I discovered it there was one egg very large and white, and one chick hot from the oven. The egg disappeared the next day and after 5 days I placed a coloured plastic ring round the leg of the chick in the hope that it would flourish in our garden and I would be able to watch its movements and report on its longevity. Unfortunately on the 7th day when I picked up the bird from the nest it was dead and full of maggots which had devoured all its flesh. The quantity of maggots was truly amazing.

Crows in Kodaikanal by C.K. Ananthasubramaniam

I am writing this to clarify a very interesting point. I have lived in Kodaikanal for 14 years from 1930 till 1944. During all these years, I have not seen a single crow there. Recently in a leading Tamil magazine Ananda Vikatan there was a report that crows are there now. I wrote to my friend Mr. B.M. Alvarez the Manager of the Kodaikanal Boat Club who

has been living there for the past 50 years to let me know whether it is a fact that crows are seen at Kodaikanal now. He says that about 3 years back, some crows used to visit Kodaikanal in summer and return to the plains in winter. Now, for the past two years or so, they have begun to reside permanently there. (Newsletter readers familiar with Kodaikanal, kindly comment on the status of the House and Jungle Crows in and around the hill station. Editor)

Ashy Drongo in Bandipur by J.S. Serrao

I have just seen Dr. Madhav Gadgil's reply at page 10 of Newsletter for Birdwatchers (Vol.8, No.7, July 1978) and am unable to understand what is implied by "However, there may be Ashy Drongo also, particularly away from the lodges."

In this part of the country the Ashy Drongo is predominantly a bird of cover, and for the first few days of its arrival in September in the Bombay area it noisily engages itself in dislodging the Black Drongo from forested areas. Thence on the Black Drongo becomes a bird of wide open areas, such as rolling field lands, lake shores, river banks, etc., and re-enters the areas of its former occupation only with the departure of the Ashy Drongo to its breeding quarters around March. Yet with its preference for forested areas the Ashy Drongo is met with along forest clearings and roads, open spaces around forested lodges and well-breed compounds and gardens dotting Bombay's cement and iron jungles. Does the bird behave differently in the Bandipur Area and keeps exclusively to forested areas, and does the Black Drongo restrict itself to clearings around forest lodges?

It would be interesting to know the pointers used for the field identification of the bird and its confirmation.

Madhav Gadgil replies

I am afraid I am not familiar with the Ashy Drongo at all. If it does occur at Bandipur, I have confused it with Black Drongo. Now that I know of this, I will look more carefully. I would be grateful if some knowledgeable reader of this Newsletter contributes a brief account and a good key for field identification of the various species of Drongos in India.

A Census of the Breeding Birds of India by Inga Willis

I have just arrived back after 4 months in Europe, and have read with much interest Newsletter for Birdwatchers for May, June, July, and August, also September's issue which arrived to-day.

It was heartening to read the unstinted praise given to Atlas Survey of Breeding Birds of Britain and Ireland. For the first 4 years of that 5-year period, I was living in the remote West of Ireland, and was one of those thousands of amateur birdwatchers on whose reports the Survey was built.

I wonder whether those who suggest a similar survey for India, have quite appreciated the difficulties that lie ahead? It is a wonderful idea, but the vastness of India, where you would be dealing with over 2000 varieties of birds instead of between 200/300, and with probably a very much smaller number of birdwatchers, make the problems at present almost insuperable.

I have lived here in Ooty now since December 1974 (apart from 4/5 months abroad each year during the monsoon period), and have lived in 3 different places - Savoy Hotel, a bungalow we hired in Havelock Road, and here at the Club. In each place, I saw birds that I did not see at the other 2 places - apart from the ubiquitous sparrow, doves, grey tit, grey wagtail, white-eyes, jungle crow, and redwhiskered bulbul, which were everywhere. If I wanted to see Indian crows, I would go to the Racecourse or the bazaar area. If I went to the Golf Course, I would almost certainly see Nilgiri Pipits and Grey Shrike, and possibly a Nilgiri Kestrel. What I am trying to say is, that they are extremely local in their distribution, and if this holds good for the whole of India, the task is well-nigh impossible.

At our bungalow, I saw quail - I think Painted Bush Quail (there was a wild tangle of vegetation and scrub hillside alongside the garden), rosefinch, small brown shrike, crow pheasant, velvet-fronted nuthatch, black and orange flycatcher, ashy wren-warbler, lorikeet (once only), Indian blue chat, goldenbacked woodpecker, besides various predators.

At Savoy Hotel, which has a lovely garden, with plenty of shrubs and big trees, I saw purple sunbirds, a golden oriole (once only) and a large green barbet (there was a bit of wild woodland adjoining the car-park) as well as all the commoner species.

Writing of Jungle Myna, Salim Ali says in his "Indian Hill Birds" 'At certain hill-stations, however, such as Ooty and Kodaikanal, it has, strangely enough, more or less completely usurped the position of Common Myna as a "house bird" '. For the last 2 years, we have had Jungle Mynas nesting inside the bargeboard of the quarter above us here at the Club. They are Cheerful, noisy, untidy, and I have noticed many different feathers being taken inside when nest-building is in progress -

many also fall out when the birds are feeding young and constantly going in and out. Any kind of feather seems to be used- crow, chicken, anything.

There are places within Doty municipal area where I have often seen Grey Jungle Fowl, Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher, and even, once only, a Paradise Flycatcher sub-adult male, with his gorgeous long chestnut streamers.

I wish you well with your plans for an Atlas Survey of the Birds of India, but I feel we shall have to recruit many more birdwatchers before it could really get started with a hope of success.

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Subscriptions for 1978 have been received from:

Mr. Subramanyam, No.1373, West of Chort Road, IInd Stage, Rajajinagar, Bangalore 560 010; Rs.5-00;

Shri. L.N.S. Nair, Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills, Tura 794001, Meghalaya; Rs.15;

Mr. Rahul Kohli, 36, Balbir Avenue, Dehradun 248001, U.P.; Rs.10;

Mr. J.A.K. Martyn, 18, Nemi Road, Dehra Dun 248001; Rs.30;

Mr. M. Mallik, 30, Companna Block, Bangalore 560 020; Rs.15.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XVIII No.11

November 1978

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A day with birds in Mamandur (near Renigunta, A.P.) by
T. Koneri Rao

Accompanied by M/s. Rajan and Raghuraman I left Madras for Tirupathi on the morning of 19th August 1978. At 2.15 p.m. we were in the rest house and we sat on the lovely verandah admiring the scenery. A few Whitebrowed, Redvented, and Redwhiskered Bulbuls visited the trees adjacent to the rest house. We left at 4.00 in the evening, taking the fire line behind the house. As soon as we came down the hillock we found a good jungle in front of us. Some Yellow-eyed Babblers were chattering from a thick bamboo bush to our left. A Rufousbacked Shrike on sighting us disappeared behind a bush and called in agitation, intermixing its cries with other birds' calls of which the Blackheaded Munias could be identified. After a while we heard a few Jungle Babblers calling "kek..kek..kek..kek". After crossing an unused well we came to a small dry stream 20 feet broad and covered through out its course with small boulders. Here we halted for some time when we heard the pleasant song of a bird which we could not locate nor identify from its sound.

We left the stream and proceeded further and after a walk of 15 to 20 minutes reached a large stream which was also dry. The bed was sandy with some rocks here and there. Here we heard a Whitebreasted Kingfisher and an Ashy Wren Warbler. A few Jungle Babblers and Bonnet Monkeys were also seen. We walked down the stream for some time and came back without finding anything. While returning a Grey Jungle Fowl walked and disappeared into the bamboo undergrowth. When we were nearing the first stream the light started fading and heard a Whitebreasted Waterhen.

We rested on the bed of the stream and decided to stay there till dark hoping to see some form of life there as visibility was clear on both sides. We were talking to each other and looking in different directions with excitement. A fairly tall tree was in front from which long creepers were hanging down right over the stream bed. On this creeper a dark coloured bird was sitting and singing softly. When it cocked its very long tail (longer than what I had seen in the books) we knew it was a Shama! It was a male Shama and in front the lower portion was dark chestnut. It allowed us to have a look at it through our binoculars for 5 to 10 minutes. Once it came down to the ground to pick some insect. And very close to the male Shama there was another tree in which

a green coloured bird was looking for insects. An insect was disturbed which dropped down to escape from the green bird but the bird was very fast and dived down and caught it in mid air, and took a long time to dispose of it. The green bird turned out to be a Goldfronted Chloropsis.

We came back to our original position on the stream bed and settled down to see whether any animal was stirring out. At dusk the jungle was silent excepting some peculiar noises from the Shama suggesting snapping of dry sticks. On investigation it was found that the Shama was mobbing a Piedcrested Cuckoo. At 6.15 p.m. a Grey Jungle Fowl crossed the stream. Very late in the evening a pair of White Spotted Fantail Flycatchers came to the top most branch of a tree close to us. When the light was very bad we returned back to our rest house. When we were climbing towards the rest house a Night Jar flew in front of us. At 7.00 p.m. we were on the verandah again. We watched for some sound from the jungle during the night but disappointingly the jungle was absolutely silent. After some time we heard jackals and we consoled ourselves with the thought that atleast these animals were there. Prior to the jackals we heard Redwattled Lapwings in the distance. We also heard some bird calls later which we could not identify. Probably they were Jungle Babblers.

Suddenly we saw the moon which was not too bright as it was cloudy. Spotted Owlets called once or twice during the night. We left at 9.00 p.m. for the forest line in the east for a night ramble with our torches. During an hours' walk we neither heard nor saw anything and we returned to the rest house at 10.15 p.m. We slept on the verandah. At 2.30 a.m. I woke up and spent the remaining hours on an arm chair intending to hear calls at dawn. At 3.30 a.m. again the jackals called, but feebly. When the day light was faint I heard some heavy animal moving in the bushes adjoining the rest house. It was rather heavy and claw sounds were also heard. Could it be a bear?

At 6.00 in the morning we left again taking the fire track behind the rest house. Near the bamboo bushes we heard and saw the Rufousbacked Shrikes which we could not see the previous evening. At the first stream we halted hoping to see more. The Shama was not seen but we thought we heard it faintly. Under a Ficus Tree we sat on the stream bed. A female Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher came to the tree. A small party of Quaker Babblers heard first and then sighted were keeping on moving from bush to bush and disappeared from the

scene. I walked along the stream and at one point saw one Spotted Fantail Flycatcher flying from one side of the stream to the other. It was seen going to clumps of bamboos. Generally these flycatchers are partial to bamboos and especially during the nesting season. I tried to locate its nest but in vain. During our stay near the bamboos we heard the peculiar purring noises from the Bustard Quail. At 9.00 a.m. reached the rest house. After fortifying ourselves with some bread and coffee we left the rest house along the eastern fire line. Again we met with a pair of Spotted Fantail Flycatchers and a Magpie Robin. The songs of these flycatchers were very short and less sweet compared to what I had heard from the species in Nagpur. After walking along the fire line we turned to our left intending to join the first stream some where. On the way saw a pair of Small Minivets. The male had an exceptionally dark red front. We located a deserted nest of a Redvented Bulbul containing 2 broken egg shells. After joining the stream and walking on the stone covered bed much to our discomfort came to our rest house at about 1.00 p.m. We returned to Madras with the addition of one more species, the Shama to my list.

Birdwatching enroute to Sandalbet "The City of Flamingoes" by D. Krupanidhi

I am serving in the Border Security Force deployed all along the international border in the Rann of Kutch. I am extremely lucky to have been posted here for the simple reason that this is one of the places in India where Flamingoes exist. This place is also a passage route for a number of migratory Birds including the Kashmir roller, Rosy pastor and others.

The Flamingo is a winter visitor and their arrival in large numbers was reported by the troops located on the border on 1 July, 1978. Flamingoes use their old nests, which are mud moulds about 2 feet high from ground level. The rains were rather early this year and the birds were reported to have been seen around 'Sandalbet' or Flamingo City, somewhere around 20 July, 1978. Subsequently there was a dry spell and the Rann around Sandalbet became dry. We had sent a patrol party to confirm the presence of 'Flamingoes' in Sandalbet on 2/8/78 and the patrol party confirmed that the Flamingoes had abandoned their old nests due to unfavourable environmental conditions. As a keen birdwatcher I volunteered to go on 6/8/78 to

Sandalbet to study the return of Flamingoes to the old nests; also to confirm the earlier information given. This information was required to be given to the Bombay Natural History Society for their ringing project on Flamingoes during August 1978.

We left for Khavda, a bordering village, about 70 Kms from Bhuj town by road. Enroute we studied and identified the following birds:- Grey Partridge, Black Partridge, Sarus Crane, Spotbill, Common Sandpiper, Avocets, White Ibis, Comb Ducks, Crested Lark, Desert Lark, Grey Shrike, Spoonbills, Grebes, Sandgrouse, and Bluecheeked Bee-eater.

We reached a village called Nirwandh at 4 p.m. by road driving crosscountry on hilly tracks and river tracks. From Nirwandh to Sandalbet has to be covered by camel back since the Rann is slushy. After having tea at Nirwandh we started our journey for Sandalbet on camel back (arrangements were made earlier). Normally the journey time between Nirwandh and Sandalbet on camels should be two hours one way, but due to bad conditions the camels took more time than expected and we could not cover even half the distance by 8 p.m. when the light started fading.

The Rann consists of peculiar country, where one loses ones bearing even during day time because there are no natural objects like trees with which one can fix directions. One can imagine the plight during night time in this open country. There is every likelihood of losing direction. We decided to stay in the same place till day light and to continue our journey during the day. I had decided at 8.30 p.m. to stay where ever we were and rest for the night. We had only water which was also insufficient, and nothing to sleep upon except the saddlery of the camels. We slept during the night on the moist ground consuming very little water, conserving it for the next day. We discussed all about the birds between 8.30 to 10.30 p.m.; then everybody went to sleep. Next day at 6 a.m. we studied our surroundings through Binoculars and spotted Flamingo City. We reached Flamingo City at 7.30 a.m. and found thousands of mud moulds with scattered unhatched eggs of last year. Since there were no birds we spent very little time around Sandalbet and returned to our base Nirwandh at 10 a.m. While returning we came across Kashmiri Rollers at Nirwandh village in good numbers, and presumed that they were on transit while migrating towards the Middle East. We also observed Gullbilled Terns around Nirwandh and in fact we could retrieve one from the slushy ground where it probably got stuck after

trying to land in the mud. Unfortunately this Tern **died** enroute. We finally returned to Bhuj on 7.8.78.

All of us wish to go to Sandalbet again during the next month when we hope to have water around Sandalbet, so that the Flamingoes come back to their old nests.

Birds seen from the backyard of a City house by A.S. Bhaduri

Recently I had to stay at home for a few days because of some minor ailment. During my forced confinement I used to pass the idle hours sitting on the steps of the house leading to the backyard. This backyard of the house which is in Alipore area of Calcutta will not measure more than twenty-five feet by fifteen feet. A high wall runs around the yard and continues round the house. The floor of the yard is cemented. Not an **inch** of open earth can be seen anywhere. I have tried to introduce a bit of greenery into the drab place by culture of potted plants. After a lot of care and perseverance, I have lately been able to grow a number of plants which now provide welcome relief to the eyes amid the dreary mass of cement and concrete of the yard.

While sitting on the steps of the backyard and watching the plants gently swaying in the breeze I found the calm and quietness of the whole scene very satisfying and passed my time without feeling the least bored in any way. Actually, there ~~was~~ no dearth of interesting things in the yard to hold one's attention. There were quite a number of birds that frequented the backyard, and I passed some delightful time watching their habits and activities and thus came to know them better.

There were sparrows, the commonest bird in the yard. They hopped in twos or threes in and around the pots pecking at unseen tit-bits and often squabbled among themselves uttering their harsh little calls. There were house crows which cawed from the top of the surrounding wall and gave the yard a close inspection from their perch. There was one particular crow that took shelter in a corner under the ledge of the house. It watched the world unobtrusively from its secluded perch and almost everyday in the late morning quietly practiced various modulations of its call. There was a little brown bird with its mate always near,

inspecting closely the leaves and fronds of the potted plants. A concealed black patch showing up in the neck as the bird uttered a loud 'to-wit' gave it out as a tailor bird. They were lively birds chasing each other and almost always on the move. Two common mynas --- must be a pair because the two always remained more or less together - sometimes walked with deliberate steps around the pots. They always regarded me with wary eyes and would not stay much longer after my appearance. Sometimes one of the birds in course of preening its feathers would puff them up frowzily and then start chuckling and chortling with great enthusiasm striking up quaint postures in the process. A much branched jujube tree has grown up outside the surrounding wall. Suddenly a tinkling voice rang out, and I looked enthralled at two redwhiskered bulbuls searching for ripe berries in the tree. Those two birds with their upstanding crests and a touch of scarlet under their vents looked definitely more stylish than the sparrows or the crows or the mynas. Once I detected a magpie-robin silently watching me from a leafy perch in the jujube tree. Its breast was dull slaty. So it must be the hen bird. It just watched me for a minute and then silently flew away.

On the ledges of the next house, a number of rock pigeons puffed their iridescent throats and cooed. Sometimes one or two of them dropped into the yard and drank from the shallow little pool formed by the water dripping from the tap. High under those ledges, there were mud houses of the house swifts. A party of these birds could be seen in the sky above sailing with speed, fluttering their long narrow wings and giving their joyous cheeping calls. Suddenly one and then another would shoot up into those nests under the ledge and then as suddenly shoot out from them and sail away. Higher still could be seen vultures with their stiffly outspread wings soaring majestically in the clear blue sky. They were slowly wheeling and were so high that they looked like midges. Sometimes one or two pariah kites could be seen among the mighty vultures soaring and sailing with them with equal ease. The kites could be easily differentiated by their longer fish-like tails and smaller sizes.

As regards bird voices tuk...tuk...tuk..., the continuous hammering of the coppersmith, was the commonest bird call. It was not unpleasant and listening to it, even for a pretty length of time, I did not find it exasperating as Mr. Whistler so unfortunately did. But however I tried, I could not locate the bird. Most probably, it was calling from some tree beyond my sight.

But, perhaps, the best bird voice heard was that of the spotted dove. I heard it not very often, the bird remaining unseen on all occasions. It was a subdued kr-kroo..kroo..kroo..kroo, tender and languorous, full of hidden pathos, making one vaguely conscious of dreams unrealised or of memories for ever lost.

Transects on the birds at Lalbaugh by M.B. Krishna. b

A number of methods exist for determining bird abundance and density, like the mark and recapture method, quadrat method etc. But the transect method I feel is one of the better methods which can be made use of for our conditions. The advantage the line transect has is, that it can be carried out by one person. It can even be undertaken from a moving car or train. The data obtained can be used to compare the abundance of birds in different habitats, to determine species composition and ratios, and to determine the habitat preferences of any given bird.

I have done transects in Lalbaugh in Bangalore. Instead of taking a straight course, I have taken a circular path each time. The observations indicate 1. The commoner species are the small green barbet, the Indian myna, house and jungle crows, and roseringed parakeets. 2. The highest bird total was reached in February. 3. The roseringed parakeet and the small green barbet were most abundant in February, whereas the Indian myna in May. 4. The golden oriole seems to be a local migrant here and comes to Lalbaugh in January and February. 5. The proportion of the tailor bird was more or less the same between May and August, with a decrease in April. 6. Though Lalbaugh is a wooded area, the Indian myna is much more common than the jungle myna.

It might however be noted that auditory signals are more important in wooded areas than in open areas and so in the case of some birds, at least, the counts might have been less during the months when they have called less.

Childrens Page by Indira Kohli

It is too early to expect a response to the first issue of the Childrens page, so while I have space, which in future will be occupied by your contributions, I'll tell you what this page is all about.

It is a forum where you may express your ideas, views and observations on birds. If you require any information or if you have any questions on birds, please write to me and I shall answer your queries to the best of my ability. Please don't hesitate to write for this page: it caters for children up to 18 years of age. Remember, you are all linked by the strong bond of a common interest, so this will help lessen the difference between the very junior Juniors and the very senior Juniors. This page can turn out to be an extremely interesting forum for Junior birdwatchers, but it all depends on you, - you have to be enthusiastic, you have to write, in short, it is your page and what it becomes depends entirely upon what you make it. I am the clearing house for your mail, for those of you who study chemistry I shall act as a catalyst in your views and reactions to each others' views.

I have recently heard that the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is gaining popularity in schools in India. Has the scheme been introduced in your schools? The scheme includes an 'Interests' section for the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. Why don't you take up a project on birds under this scheme. Here are some ideas: - For the Bronze award: observe the birds within the school campus. Make a bird bath in the Crafts section and stand it in a quiet part of the school garden. Sprinkle bread crumbs near it at about the same time every day and if you are very patient the birds will gradually become friendly. Try and identify the birds that come to the bird bath. Write down their names and all that you notice about them and their habits. - For the Silver award: Go birdwatching regularly once a week throughout the school term and draw up a list of birds sighted and identified. Observe them, their behavior, what they eat, try and detect their nests, and describe everything you observe about them as accurately as possible. - For those of you who are older. How many of you have thought about the effect of the urban population explosion on birds? Orchards are being cut down to make room for new housing complexes. The spacious gardens of old houses are being acquired under land ceiling rules, - everything has a place in the sun, so where do the birds go that pecked at the fruit and supped on nectar from flowers? Some forest streams no longer flow clear and sweet; they bear an oily film on the surface and the waters are opaque due to pollution from effluents of ill-planned factories, so where will the kingfisher fish? What is the effect of pesticides on birds that feed on grain?

These are all interesting projects to be tackled. Even if you are not working for an award in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, the junior page of this magazine will be very interested in the results of any project you undertake, so please write, and address your letters to Indira Kohli, 36, Balbir Avenue, Dehradun 248001, U.P.

Ref: Childrens Page
Vol. XVIII No.9 Sept. 1978.

Dear Rahul,

Would you like to describe the 'Honeysucker' that you have mentioned in your very interesting article? Perhaps we will be able to identify the bird for you.

Sincerely,

INDIRA KOHLI.

Correspondence

Wagtails and the Brown Shrike by Dr. A.K. Dutta

For some years I have been keeping a watch on the first arrival of the Wagtails during the month of September.

In Jamshedpur the Wagtails are usually sighted for the first time within three or four days after the 20th of September every year. Till a decade back they were seen in large numbers and both the White and Grey varieties were common. Now only a pair or two are seen in any particular locality, the White variety being the predominant one.

During my observations I have been greatly impressed by the striking association of the arrival of the Wagtails with that of another bird - the Brown Shrike. Every year the Brown Shrike is seen, or more often heard, unfailingly a day prior to the first sighting of the Wagtail.

Though the Wagtails have dwindled in number the Brown Shrikes are still plentiful. In Jamshedpur the Wagtails generally leave by the end of March but the Brown Shrikes remain till the middle or the end of April.

My knowledge of ornithology is limited to that imparted by Dr. Salim Ali's small "Book of Indian Birds". Unfortunately, in this volume the Brown Shrike is not included. I had the great good fortune of meeting Dr. Salim Ali some years back. He was himself surprised by the omission of the Brown Shrike in his book.

Not having ready access to the larger tomes I would like to be enlightened by someone kind on the life story of this common and interesting bird - the Brown Shrike. I would particularly like to know if it is truly migratory and where it goes when not seen or heard during the months of April to September. I am referring to the region around Jamshedpur to which my birdwatching activities are generally restricted. I would also like to know if the almost simultaneous arrival of Wagtails and Brown Shrike has any explanation.

May I suggest that the Newsletter publishes an informative note on an uncommon, but likely to be seen occasionally, species of bird, in each issue. This will be of great help to the not so knowledgeable birdwatchers like me.

Attributes of Papiha by R.E. Hawkins

Chaturvedi & Tiwari's Practical Hindi-English Dictionary tells me that papiha is 'a typical species of Cuckoo (which finds usual mention in Indian love-songs as exemplifying the ideal of love-lorn beings) - Cuculus melanoleucos'. Cuculus melanoleucos used to be the name of Clamator jacobinus servatus. Will some reader kindly tell me what attributes of the ideal lover this cuckoo represents in Indian literature?

In Handbook 3 papiya is recorded as the Hindi name of both the Pied Crested Cuckoo and the Common Hawk-Cuckoo or Brainfever Bird (Cuculus varius varius). The latter is only a local migrant, but apparently both sexes move together so it is not a case of 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'. Brood-parasitism is an improbable ideal to recommend, so what can it be?

Crows in Kodaikanal by Thomas Gay

The latest Newsletter raises the question of Crows in Kodaikanal. May 1969 is ancient history by now, but if someone had consulted our index (I seem to remember seeing it) he would have found my article on that very topic, on p.6. Well, Australia must have

had its First Rabbit, and Poona certainly had its First Parthenium Weed (1961, I think); and Kodai is having its First Crows, but here - unlike Rabbits and Campus-grass - it is difficult to see the interesting hand of man.

Scarlet Minivets by Indra Kumar Sharma

Mr. Pankaj Kumar (NLBW, September, 1978) says that 'he observed a large flock of the Scarlet Minivets (Pericrocotus flammeus) females, but not a single male could be spotted'. As the Minivet lives separately in male and female flocks during the winter, Mr. Kumar could observe only the female flock and male flocks could be away, being more hardy and dynamic. Dr. Salim Ali has reported sexual segregation of the bird in the winter in his book 'Indian Birds'.

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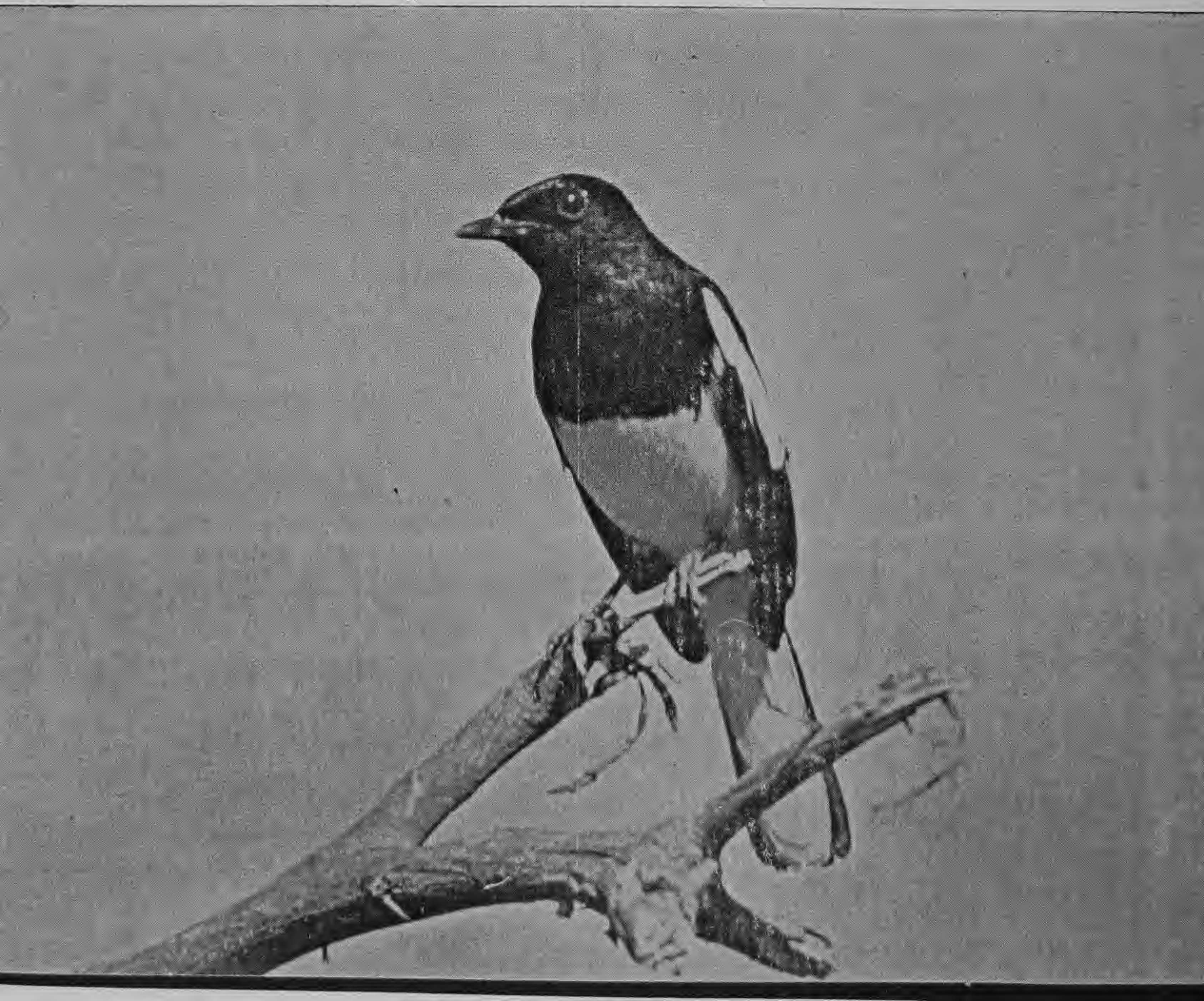
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Subscriptions for 1978 have been received from:

Mr. Pradyuman Desai, Takhteshwar Plot, Bhavnagar 364002: Rs.15;
 Mr. S.G. Neginhal, Asst. Conservator of Forests, Mundgod P.O., District Karwar, Karnataka: Rs.15; Mr. S.Kandhari, The Doon School, Dehradun, U.P. (1978, & 1979) & Mr. N. Kandhari, Keswick Cottage, Fytchley Hill, Khandala, Maharashtra : Rs.72;
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The K.K. Surendran Prize

The time has come to make a decision about the K.K. Surendran prize which as readers will recall was offered for the best article published in the Newsletter during 1978.

I am glad to say that the selection has not been easy because there were so many interesting and valuable pieces in the field. I have been wondering how one should make this selection: interesting writing, discovery of new species, sustained field work, information leading to conservation of species or habitat, promoting public interest, and so on. While I do not wish to make an exhaustive review of all the articles which were short listed as possible candidates for the prize, I will make a few comments just to share my thoughts on the problem.

Aamir Ali has the sort of light touch and agility of expression which makes his writing so appropriate for the Newsletter. His work entails a great deal of travel and he makes the most of these trips for bird-watching. Brother Navarro is a truly committed watcher and his articles have often given us new insights into bird activity. The article by Ananta Mitra (October 1978) on the Pallas's Fishing Eagle of the Salt Lake area of Calcutta, is the result of a decade of observation of these fishing eagles and is the type of reporting which can lead to conservation action. Copies of the article have been sent to the authorities in West Bengal appealing afresh for keeping the Salt Lake area as well protected bird sanctuary. Lt. Col. James Roberts must be complimented for recording the first breeding of the Mallard and the Ruddy Shelduck in Nepal. The articles on the Birds of the Dalma Hill by Ashok Kumar, on Birdwatching in Madras by V. Santharam, the one on the Birds of Mamandur by T. Koneri Rao, and several general pieces contributed during the year, are good examples of how much enjoyment one can derive from birdwatching by keeping careful notes of what is seen.

Army personnel have in the past been accused of playing a destructive role and it was therefore particularly cheering to read the article "Birdwatching enroute to Sandalbet The City of Flamingoes" by D. Krupanidhi. The army has such excellent opportunities to visit areas out of bounds for ordinary citizens, that it is to be hoped that members of the armed forces will continue to look for birds whenever opportunity arises.

Reverting to the subject of the prize I think it will be generally agreed that it would be hard to beat Madhav Gadgil for his article on Bandipur in the May issue. For sometime I resisted deciding in his favour because he is in a way a highly qualified professional and I would have preferred to give the prize to an amateur. But the quality of his article leaves no choice. As readers will recall

he organized a group of 17 students to spend a period of 80 days in the Tiger Reserve of Bandipur. They listed over a 100 odd species, discovered that 7 species of Woodpeckers ranging from the Pigmy to the Great Black occupied the habitat. He discussed the phenomenon of two similar species of the same genus which presumably occupied different environments initially, converging in the same locality in course of time and coming closer together in appearance as well. He cites the instance of *Dinopium javanense* and *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* in Bandipur. His group identified 18 species of regular fruit eating birds and Madhav makes the interesting observation that only in the tropics where there is such a variety of fruit trees providing fruits and berries in all periods of the year, that it is possible to have exclusively frugivorous birds. Finally his discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the long tail of the Peacock indicates the fascinating avenues in which the birdwatcher can speculate, provided only that his thinking is always anchored to scientific facts.

The Newsletter is delighted to offer the K.K. Surendran prize to Madhav Gadgil.

Birdwatching in the land of the Dragon by Br. A. Navarro, S.J.

Bhutan has much interesting bird life but it is a country without long landscapes, broad ravines and flat terraces. It is a mere agglomeration of hills, some taller than others, with long ravines and narrow gorges, with a network of streams, rivulets and torrents which later form into large rivers.

From the frontier up to the capital Thimpu there is a fine road. It took over ten hours with a few stop-overs for tea and snacks. We reached Thimpu late in the evening, and spent the night at the Capital. The next day at 8 a.m. we boarded the bus which took us to our final destination, Punakha, at the farther end of the Western side of the country. We went through fine patches of forest with a large variety of pine trees and splendid views of large and deep ravines. On the whole the second part of the journey was far better than the first.

Punakha village is the centre of that district. The altitude is 1200 metres. From the valley we could admire the summit of Mount Jomo Lhari, the highest mountain in Bhutan (7997 metres). Most of the population is scattered all over the country-side. The villages and central districts are the tiny nucleus of the population. This nucleus is important because they have a Post and Telegraph Office, a doctor or compounder, a forest office and a shopping centre.

We were lodged in the Punakha Central School under the care and direction of Father Joe Peikeday S.J. The medium of instruction is English. This was the centre of our activities.

Throughout the first night I could hear the calling of the Indian Hoopoe. The next day we saw it almost everywhere. Suddenly after eight days it vanished from that area and its calls were replaced by the Quaker Babbler. For some time they were very noisy.

Every day a couple of students from the higher standards were my guides in my daily walks. For the first few days we explored the nearby hills. Later we made our way deep into the valley and tried to explore the high hills where the environment ~~was~~ wilder and secluded.

Once as we were climbing up, our sudden appearance dispersed a mixed group of Tits feeding among small shrubs. They flew up to the nearest trees, where we noticed the Yellow Tits and the Greenbacked Tits. On the same hill the next day we saw two parties of Coal Tits. On this occasion my guides mentioned groups of small Tits with red heads seen there at certain times of the year in the same locality. They must have been the Red-headed Tits.

Another day, as we were climbing one of the high hills in the neighbourhood of the school, we came across a small group of Black Drongos. As we were commenting on the habits of these birds, we saw the Yellow-billed Magpie flying among tall trees in the thick patch of forest. The boys at once said that the Yellow-billed Magpie was often seen in that locality.

Two varieties of Green Pigeons and one Dove were seen in various altitudes of the forest. The most common was the Orange Breasted Pigeon. These Pigeons were often seen in groups, shifting from tree to tree in search of food. We saw them also along the river banks wherever there was plenty of vegetation. The Thickbilled Green Pigeon, was often found in pairs, apparently confined to the forest and secluded spots. The Spotted Dove was found in the same area as the Redbreasted Green Pigeon. Their presence was known to us by their deep sounds, Krookroo Krookroo, repeated five to seven times in succession.

On the slopes of the hills and valleys of Punakha area the most common birds were the Jungle Crow, the Common Myna, the Common Sparrow and the Tailor Bird. By the side of the river Phochhu is the most outstanding building of the area, a large monastery or Gong. We saw several hundred Blue Rock Pigeons on its roof.

We frequently saw the Redvented Bulbul. On a few occasions we heard the calls of the Orange Bellied Chloropsis, one of the best songsters of this small group of Bulebuls. As we reached the top of a hill 300 metres high, we heard the calls of the Hawk Cuckoo. Luckily we were able to

record the calls of this rare Cuckoo. By the river side in the evening of the same day, we heard the calls of the Sirkeer Cuckoo and the Himalayan Tree Pie and we saw the Crow Pheasant.

One of the main objectives of our trip to Bhutan was to record the songs of the birds of this region. But as I had foreseen I found a great similarity with the songs of the Birds of Nepal which were collected in May 1976. Therefore I limited my recordings exclusively to the birds of Bhutan. Nevertheless for especial reasons a few songs were duplicated.

The only interesting finds were several pairs of Redwattled Lapwings that had settled along the river, on large patches of gravel (like islands) in the middle of the river at one spot where the river and the road were running side by side for about three hundred metres. Pedestrians passed by without stopping to look at them, and the birds were most unconcerned. But when we stopped to watch them, one of them at once flew over, protesting frantically. Meanwhile, the other partner was running up and down the island and occasionally flew over to join in its partner's protests.

On observing this behaviour we came to the conclusion that the Redwattled Lapwings were engaged in nesting activities.

In my daily contact with the students who, with keen interest accompanied me on my rounds, I came to know that they knew the birds of their locality very well. The main obstacle was the lack of knowledge of some English names. Luckily, part of the problem was solved by the use of visual pictures from a few books brought for this purpose. The books were "The Birds of Sikkim", the "Birds of Nepal" and the last publication of Dr. Salim Ali "The Field Guide of the Birds of Eastern Himalayas."

The boys spoke to me of the Peacock Pheasant as if they had seen this beautiful bird. They had also seen the Kaleej Pheasant and the Monal Pheasant. They remarked that during the winter season there is a large variety of birds. They spoke of a Crow with a red bill, that is the Redbilled Chough and of a large Crow - the Raven. They described the Cross-bills, the Finches and the Red and Yellow Buntings as winter visitors. They mentioned two varieties of Partridges, of which one comes from Tibet and can be seen during the winter season. They also could recognise the songs of many Himalayan birds. As regards nocturnal birds, they mentioned that they had seen large and small owls, both having the ear tuft, a peculiarity of a good number of night birds.

On our way back we stopped for three days at Kharbandhi, a good spot for birdwatching. On the first day, late in the evening, we heard the call of a Nightjar. The next day it called again, almost at the same time, and we recorded its calls.

The same day due to the remarkable acoustic conditions of that area we obtained fine recordings of the Tailor Bird and the Quaker Babbler. After some time we recorded the pleasant melodies of a small group of Short-billed Minivets and once more the Nightjar. We also recorded the dueting of four Himalayan Green Barbets. On the last day we captured a few short calls of the Large Pied Hornbill. The sounds produced by the flapping of the Hornbills' wings were audible from a great distance. The last two birds we saw were the Common Myna and the Northern Hill Myna, the latter being without exception the best talker amongst Mynas and Parakeets.

On two different occasions we saw the Indian Kestrel. It so happened that on the day before our departure, we discovered the nest of an Indian Kestrel on a large tree at Punakha itself, by the riverside and in the midst of the shopping center. The nest was on a broad stump about forty feet from the ground and well concealed by heavy fresh foliage. Our aim was to collect one egg for the school egg collection. We arranged for a man to climb to the nest. To our great surprise he brought down a tiny kestrel chick about fifteen days old. We brought the chick to Bombay. The curious fact about this nest is the departure of this Indian Kestrel from its natural selection for its nest. The Indian Kestrels place their eggs in a "sketchy pad of straw etc. in a cleft or hole in a precipitous cliff, usually inaccessible". From the Hand-book of the Birds of India and Pakistan Vol. 1 pg. 368.

Occasionally we went up and down the sides of the river Phochhu in search of waterbirds like Forktails, Red Starts, Snipes, Kingfishers etc. but none of these were found.

(I asked Br. Navarro why it was necessary for him to take the kestrel chick from the nest and whether he had any permit from the authorities to do so. Section 12 of the Wild Animals Protection Act of 1972 says

"Notwithstanding anything contained elsewhere in this Act, it shall be lawful for the Chief Wildlife Warden, to grant, with the previous permission of the State Government, a permit, by an order in writing stating the reasons therefor to any person on payment of such fee as may be prescribed, which shall entitle the holder of such permit to hunt, subject to such condition as may be specified therein, any wild animal specified in such permit, for the purpose of - a) Education, b) Scientific Research, or c) Collection of specimens for zoological gardens, museums and similar institutions".

I do not know if there is such an act in Bhutan but no eggs or chicks should normally be removed from the nest. In reply to my query Br. Navarro wrote to say that he chloroformed the chick and placed it in formaline, and brought it to the Bombay Natural History Society for identification. The Society confirmed that it was a Kestrel and the fact that the bird was nesting on a tree rather than in the usual site which is a cliff has provided new evidence about the adaptability of this bird.)

Birdwatching on two Sundays in Kutch by M.B. Khatri

On the 10th September, 1978 we, along with members of the Pelican Nature Club, went to the Banni accompanied by M.K. Himatsinhji. On the way we halted at a jheel, Devisar, where we saw the usual waders such as little stints, common sandpipers, whistling teals, green sandpipers, reeves, whiskered terns, comb duck and heard a black partridge calling. Farther on down the road to Pachcham we saw more little stints, Temminik stints and plenty of Lesser sandplovers and some whiskered terns.

We drove up to Bhirandiara and from there branched off to the west into the Banni. We saw the pale brown shrike, and a number of bluecheeked bee-eaters (which were also present along the road from Loria to Bhirandiara), a white-eyed buzzard and some pale harriers. On two 'dhands' (A 'dhandh' is a collection of water in a depression in the Banni, several such shallow lagoons, large and small get filled up during the monsoon) we saw blackwinged stilts in large numbers, reeves, blacktailed godwits, a group of about a dozen glossy ibis, and many waders. In addition to these there were flocks of garganey teal and perhaps common teal but these could not be definitely identified. Our mentor, Shri. M.K. Himatsinhji said that most of them appeared to be common teal. The most interesting find of the day were between 20-25 white storks which were present on the two dhandhs. On our way back to Bhuj we saw three young flamingoes in their immature grey and dark color plumage with dark bills and legs. This proves that the flamingoes have their broods somewhere in the Rann. These were present on a small waterhole between Bhirandiara and Loria in the company of some more teal and grey duck which appeared to be looking for nesting sites.

Last Sunday, 17th September 1978 we went with Himatsinhji to Mandvi. Besides seeing some waders like curlews, grey plovers and oystercatcher, and others, we saw sand-grouse, black ibis, indian courser, plenty of european rollers, a few pale brown shrikes, spotted flycatchers, several pale harriers, and laggar falcon in the Vijaya Vilas Palace grounds. However the most exciting bird of the day was a golden-backed woodpecker in the Vijaya Vilas garden. We were very excited to see it since it was a new bird for our area. We all had a good luck at it through our binoculars for it did not mind our presence and allowed us to study its plumage in detail from very close.

Himatsinhji said that it might belong to the paler sind race since it had faint white spots on its yellow plumage clearly visible through the binoculars, a long crest, and glistening white areas on the throat and the underside.

Except for a reference to Hume's sighting of this woodpecker in the Birds of Gujarat by Dr. Salim Ali, there is no record of its occurrence in Kutch. This raises an interesting question as to how it came into this area? There are only two possible routes which

could be followed. One of them is from the extreme South or South-west corner of Sindh in Pakistan into Lakhpat, situated in the North-west part of Kutch; and the other way would be from the Banaskantha District of Northern Gujarat into Rapar Taluka. Birdwatchers from Sindh (Pakistan) and from Northern Gujarat and Southern Rajasthan from Abu Road westwards and southwards who either read or contribute notes and articles to the Newsletter could throw some light on the extent of the occurrence of the Goldenbacked Woodpecker in the respective areas of the subcontinent.

Rearing of the Common Cuckoo by Rufousbacked Shrikes by Arvind Gupte, Sita Kapur, Sudarshan Kumar Kapur and Arivind Gupta.

In India the Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) is found mainly in the Himalayan ranges and foothills. Its occurrence in the plains has been sporadically reported. However, there are no authentic reports of the Common Cuckoo breeding in the plains of Central India.

Hume (1890) says, "The Common Cuckoo breeds with us, so far as I know, only in the Himalayas, though Mr. F.R. Blewitt is of the opinion that it must breed occasionally in the hilly forest tracts of the Central Provinces, as he has met with it during every month of the year." Whistler (1941) is also of the opinion that "This (*Cuculus canorus*) breeds in the Himalayas and also apparently in some of the ranges of Central India. Both races (*Cuculus canorus canorus* and *Cuculus canorus telephonus*) in winter migrate to the plains of India, some birds even reaching Ceylon". According to Salim Ali (1977) the Common Cuckoo in the Eastern Himalayas is brood-parasitic on a wide range of hosts: pipits, shrikes, babblers, flycatchers, chats."

Recently we gathered some circumstantial evidence about the breeding of the Cuckoo at the Friends Rural Centre (FRC) which is situated in a village 1 kilometre from the Hoshangabad Railway Station. Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh is situated in the Narmada valley - bordered by the Vindhya ranges to the North and the Satpuras to the South. Friends Rural Centre has a large number of trees of various species on its campus.

In the beginning of July 1978 we noticed the nest of a Rufousbacked Shrike (*Lanius schach*) in the fork of a *Spathodia campanulata* tree about 2 metres above the ground. A pair of Rufousbacked Shrikes were seen incubating five eggs in the nest from the middle of July onwards. The eggs were a very delicate pale blue, speckled with dark spots.

In the last week of July we saw that four of the eggs had been knocked out of the nest and there was a newly hatched dark grey ungainly looking chick in the nest. The Shrikes continued to sit on it.

On August 23 at about 8.30 a.m. we saw a Common Cuckoo chick perched less than a metre above the ground. It was the size of a Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) and had the typical markings of a Common Cuckoo. The horizontal brown bars on the underparts and a white patch on the head were clearly visible. The mouth of the chick was bright orange-yellow and its incessant loud call was reminiscent of the squeak of an uncoiled bicycle. Soon a Rufousbacked Shrike appeared with an insect in its beak and fed it to the Cuckoo. The feeding continued throughout the day and the Cuckoo chick seemed to have an insatiable appetite as it kept calling for food and following the Shrike constantly. This Cuckoo chick was seen in the Friends Rural Centre till September 7.

On August 27 we saw yet another Common Cuckoo chick being fed by a different Rufousbacked Shrike about 200 metres away from the area frequented by the first Cuckoo chick. This second chick was seen for the last time on September 5.

On August 28 we saw a third Cuckoo chick as it tried to approach a Rufousbacked Shrike for food but was chased away. Later on it caught and ate an insect on its own. It was seen in the Friends Rural Centre only for one day.

Our observations about the occurrence of the adult Cuckoo are as follows:

1. The Common Cuckoo has been quite noticeable at the Friends Rural Centre for the last two summers. By the beginning of June its characteristic call (Cuck-koo) could be heard throughout the day and often late into the evening and it could be seen perched on the tops of high trees.
2. We observed it about 18 km southeast of Hoshangabad across the Tawa river on June 15, 1978.
3. At the Friends Rural Centre we have not heard the call of the Brain-fever Bird (*Cuculus varius*) during these two years.
4. At Pachmarhi and at the village of Palia Piparia, 100 km south of Hoshangabad, the call of the Brainfever Bird was heard incessantly in May and June, but not that of the Common Cuckoo.
5. At the Friends Rural Centre the adult Common Cuckoo was not seen after July and the chicks appeared at the end of August.

The following questions are suggested by our rather sketchy observations:

1. Did a Common Cuckoo lay the five eggs which we saw in the nest of the Rufousbacked Shrike in July?

2. Did the single chick in the nest push out the eggs we noticed lying on the ground? (According to Whistler, "When the young Cuckoo is hatched, a curious provision of nature comes into play. It proceeds to eject the rightful eggs or young of the nest by getting them on to its back and gradually pushing them over the side, to die unnoticed below the nest. A hollow formation of the back in the early days of the Cuckoo's life is obviously adapted to this purpose and the reason for it is evident".)
3. Did the Cuckoo breed in the Friends Rural Centre for the first time? (This would appear to be the case. There is no record during the past ten years of Cuckoo chicks having been fostered in this place.)
4. Do the Common Cuckoo and the Brainfever Bird occupy mutually exclusive territories?

What we have presented above is a preliminary note based on our observations. We hope to take up the study of the breeding habits of the Cuckoo as a regular project in the summer of 1979. We would welcome help and guidance from your readers interested in the project.

- References: 1. Ali, Salim (1977): Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas.
 2. Jume, Allen D (1890): The Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds Vol.II Edited by Eugene William Oates.
 3. Whistler, Hugh (1941): Popular Handbook of Indian Birds.

Correspondence

Unusual behaviour of a roller by A.P. Gupte

The Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) is a fairly common bird in our country. It is mainly a bird of the 'open country' and can be seen during the day time keeping a watch for its prey from a suitable perch. It is rather shy of man.

However, on 19-9-1978 I saw a Roller catching insects on the main platform of the Bhopal railway station at 7 p.m. The platform was very crowded at that time but the bird quite nonchalantly pursued the insects both on the platform and in the air. It did not pay any attention to the people on the platform. The hour was also rather unusual for a Roller to come out, for it had become fairly dark and the insects were in fact being attracted by the lights on the platform.

On 25.9.1978 I again happened to be at the Bhopal railway station at the same hour. But the Roller was nowhere to be seen. My inquiries from porters and vendors on the platform failed to elicit any information about the bird.

Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*) in Norfolk by S.K. Reeves

Considerable excitement was caused when a male Desert Wheatear turned up in Norfolk recently.

It was first seen on or about the 14th October at Cley, and stayed about three or four days.

The bird kept within a very small area along the junction of the shingle beach and the saltmarsh.

It fed in the tide-wrack and was most approachable.

The bird is a very scarce visitor to the British Isles, having occurred only about twenty times altogether. This is only the second record for Norfolk. The first occurrence was also in October - on the 31st in 1907, and that bird too was a male. Needless to say, it was shot and finished up in a private collection. This one was accorded far greater hospitality I am happy to say.

The species is fairly common in India in the winter, and our Indian readers will therefore be surprised to learn from how far afield people came to see the bird. One birdwatcher told us he had come from Nottinghamshire, another said he had come four hundred miles and I was told of three young enthusiasts who had hired a helicopter and come from the Scilly Isles, only to find that the bird had gone.

Bird news on AIR by K.J. Sekar

While listening to the 9 p.m. AIR News on 14 November 1978, I was pleasantly surprised to hear a news report on the arrival of Cranes in India (in the Bharatpur Sanctuary). I am sure that all bird lovers who heard it must have been glad that the mass media should take the initiative in broadcasting such interesting news.

This set me thinking and I soon realised that a weekly or fortnightly report on the new arrivals etc. in the various bird sanctuaries, would be warmly welcomed as a new feature of news report. For a start a broad wildlife news covering both birds and animals can be broadcast once every fortnight at some suitable time and with its gaining popularity can be gradually introduced as a weekly programme and ultimately as a daily programme too.

This will not only serve the eager and initiated listeners but also induce more and more people to take an interest in our colourful denizens of the wild, not to speak of the indirect influence on tourism promotion.

Cannot eminent naturalists like Dr. Salim Ali, M. Krishnan and our Editor do something in this regard? I wish they would.

The Woodcocks in the Nilgiris by R. Sugathan

The Woodcock is a regular winter migrant to the higher elevations of the Western Ghats (The Nilgiris). Among its wintering fields, the shola forests of the Nilgiris form an important part. This seems to be favourite area for them presumably because it has got a resemblance to its native habitat in the Himalayas.

Well experienced shikaries and birdwatchers of the plateau say that there is a considerable reduction in numbers of this migrant during the last few years. Is it because they are not coming to the Western Ghats? If so where else are they going? In the Nilgiris of course there are changes in the environment during the last ten years. Another point worth mentioning is that these birds are permitted to be shot by the Game Association of the Nilgiris till last season. It will be worthwhile studying the causes for the decrease in the number of these birds year after year.

Mynas feeding on lizards by V. Santharam

This is with reference to Shri. Manjit Singh Dhindsa's report in the January 1978 issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers on common mynah's feeding on wall-lizard .

I have had the opportunity of watching them feeding on garden lizards.

The first was on 18th September 1977, at about 8.00 a.m. The mynah was on the wall when it caught sight of a young lizard. It caught the prey and flew off, with the struggling reptile in its beak.

The second occasion was on 28th October 1978 at about 2.30 p.m. This time also the bird sighted its prey from the wall and was trying to keep pace with it from the wall as the young lizard moved along the ground. Then the bird came to the ground, chased its quarry and finally caught it by its neck. Then it proceeded to beat the prey on the ground holding its neck and tail. The mynah would have had its lunch but for the appearance of a boy at which the bird let out an alarm call and flew off leaving its prey behind. The half-dead lizard having got a new lease of life moved into the shelter of a nearby plant.

The third occasion was on 30th October 1978 at about 10.30 a.m. I appeared on the scene when the lizard was knocking a lizard on the roadside. This time also it was disturbed, but the bird was clever enough to carry the prey as it took to its wing.

The Sanderling (*Calidris albus*) in Kerala by Dr. K.V. Sreenivasan

Including the Sanderling in his "Birds of Kerala" (Oxf. Univ. Press, 1969), Dr. Salim Ali remarked that it "must undoubtedly occur on the Kerala coast in winter". In the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vol. No. 67, p. 570) K.K. Neelakantan recorded the taking of a specimen of the Sanderling on 24-11-1968 at Dharmadam, Cannanore Dist., and of seeing 4 more on 21-12-1968 at the same place.

On 15th October, 1978, Professor Neelakantan and I were looking for birds on the Kovalam and Poovar beaches. Near the Kovalam lighthouse we saw a flock of 15 Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) a few of which still had much black on face, throat and breast. At Poovar, on the bank of the river close to the river-mouth, we saw first a single Sanderling in the company of a dozen Lesser Sandplovers and then 44 or 45 Sanderlings all close together but strug out along a short stretch of the river bank. As it was 11.30 a.m. the Sanderlings and their companions were all resting and preening. About a dozen Sanderlings were squatting in the damp earth with their breasts and bellies pressed into the cool mud.

The sight of these flocks of Turnstones and Sanderlings made me wonder whether, at least in so far as our area is concerned, it is birds or birdwatchers that are rarer!

Without comment by ZF

The Editor of the Newsletter was somewhat taken aback by an enquiry from the Editor, Science News and Features, Dhanbad 826001. The question was "Do peacocks copulate through mouth? Recently I have read it in a book by Acharya Rajnesh".

Financial Position

We are glad to report that at the end of the year we have an amount of approximately Rs. 700 left in the Newsletter Account. This is the first year that the Editor has not been out of pocket and for which he is most grateful to the Subscribers, Donors and Advertisers. The amount received from advertisements was Rs. 1,700 and the number of Subscribers in 1978 were 213.

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Errata

On page 11-12 of the November issue there are 2 spelling mistakes in the note on Crows in Kodaikanal by Thomas Gay. Campus Grass should be Congress grass, and "the interesting hand of man" should be "interfering hand of man".

Editor